



# residential architect

A HANLEY-WOOD, INC., PUBLICATION / JULY · AUGUST 1999

## divine interventions

robert m. gurney  
and the modern spirit  
of remodeling

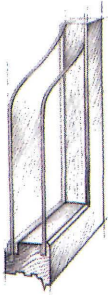
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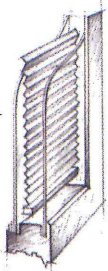
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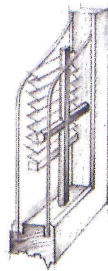
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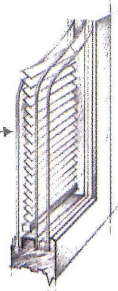
w/optional  
pleated shades.



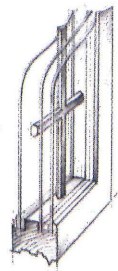
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# contents



## cover story:

### altered states...page 52

Robert M. Gurney and other young architects  
redefine remodeling.

Cover photo: Katherine Lambert

**from the associate editor...**page 13

**letters...**page 18

**home front...**page 24

Chicago renovation / Condo by Stern / Residential products online /  
Boston Society of Architects design awards / Degrees of separation /  
REACH: a technical resource for architects / Postcard from Germany

**perspective...**page 38

Architect Stephen Tilly recalls the pleasures and trepidations of working for  
client Philip Johnson.

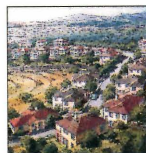
**practice...**page 44

How to develop a residential contract that works for you *and* your clients.



**universal design...**page 66

According to its proponents, universal design is just another way to  
say good design. Here are four spaces—a kitchen, a bath, a home  
office, and an exterior entry—that comfortably accommodate everyone.



**americans abroad...**page 76

Working overseas offers unique opportunities and challenges  
for U.S. architects. We talk with eight firms about their  
experiences in foreign markets.

**off the shelf...**page 84

Barrier-free products that make life easier for homeowners and family  
members with physical disabilities.

**tech lines...**page 88

Doing research on the Web? These online tools can help.

**doctor spec...**page 94

The pros and cons of composite decking.

**hands on...**page 100

A charmingly curvaceous dormer required skillful execution of a  
tricky design.

**special places...**page 120

Architect Michael Pyatok's photo essay celebrates the chaotic allure  
of four communities abroad.





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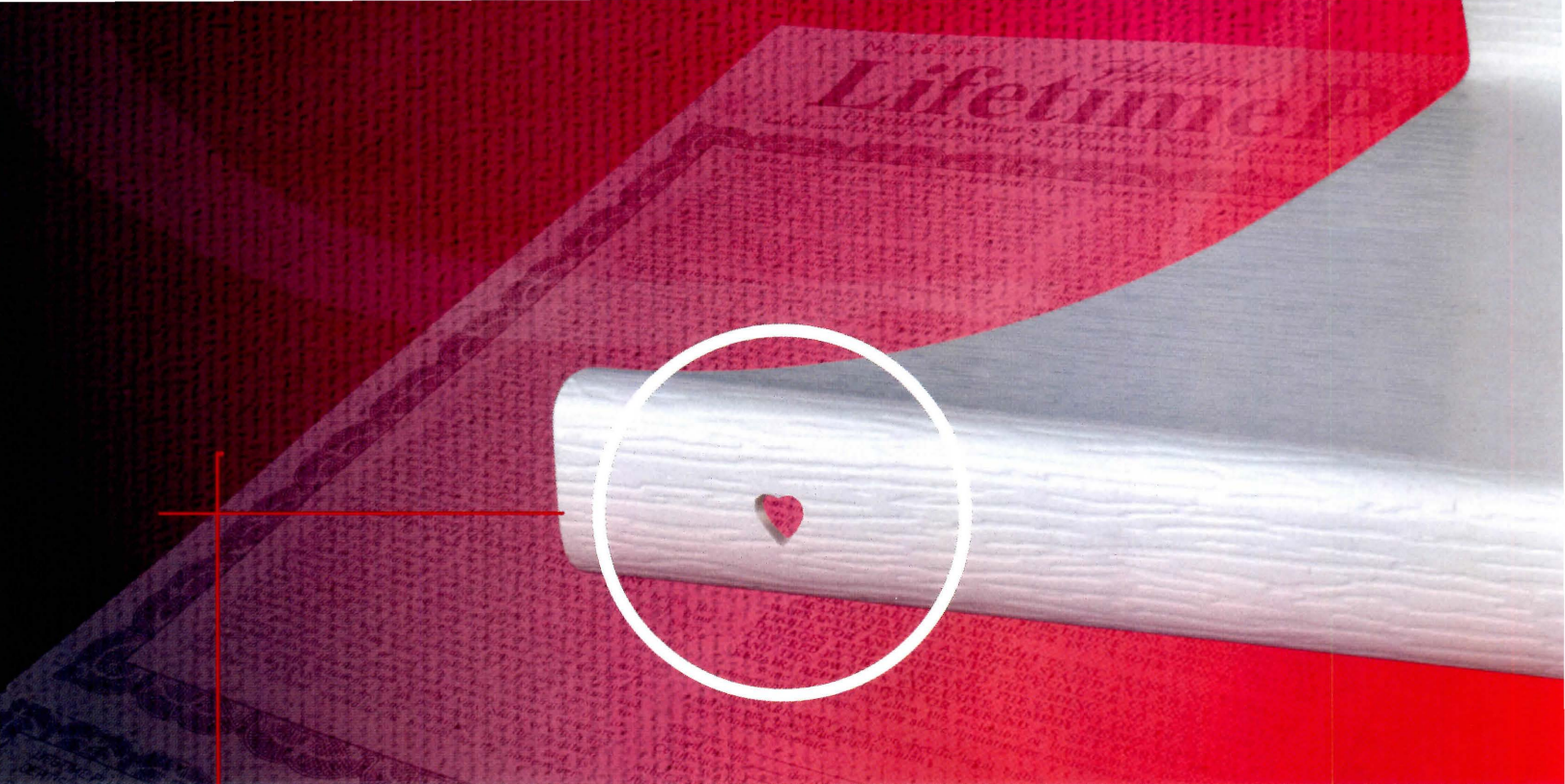


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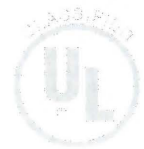
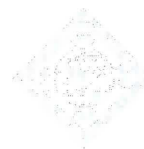
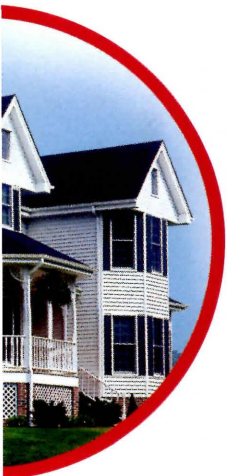
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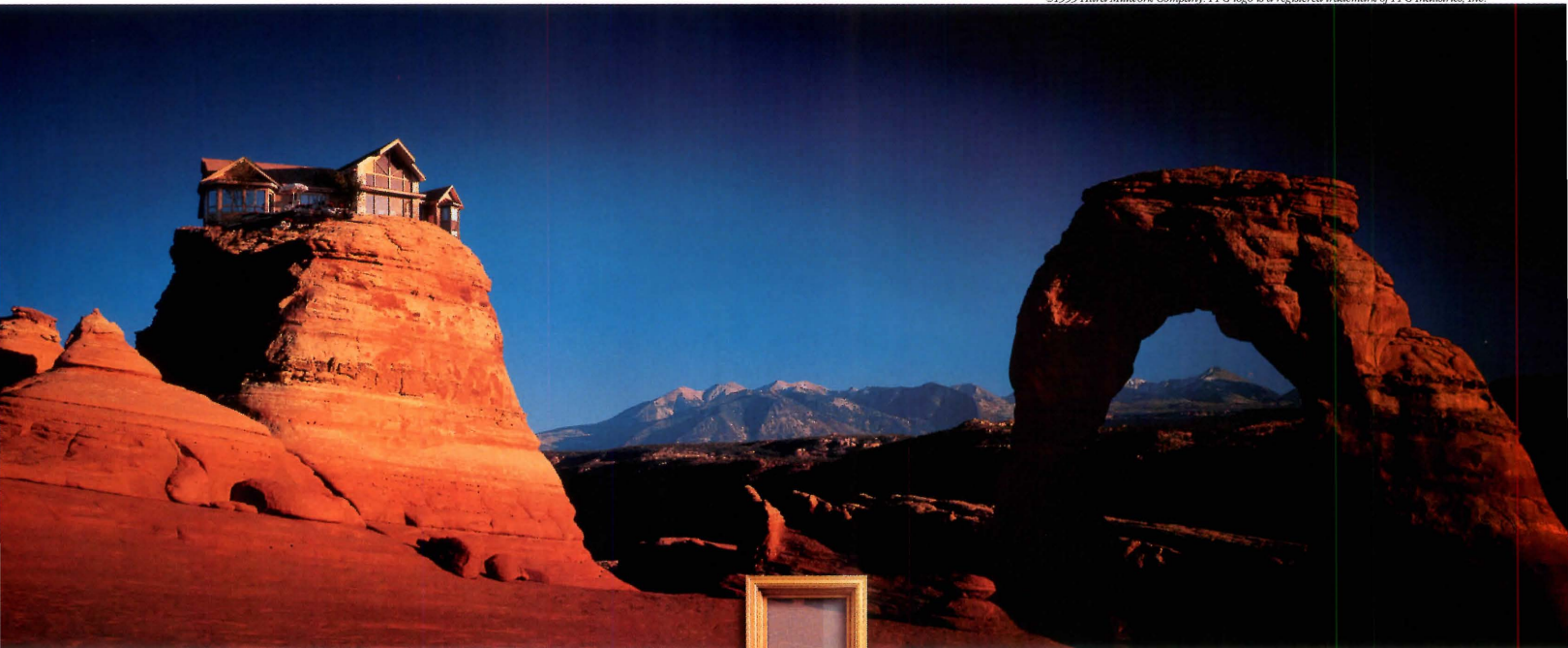
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# room for improvement

*residential architect* kicks off its expanded coverage of remodeling-related topics.

by meghan drueding

**W**e'd like to think our magazine is perfect. But, like an architect obsessing over the workings of a floor plan, we're always looking for ways to make it more relevant to the practice of residential architecture. And after two years of dialogue with readers all over the country, we realized we've been shortchanging a crucial aspect of the design profession—remodeling.

## generation next

Remodeling used to be a common first step for architects who were just launching their practices. Begin with a small, manageable addition here, a kitchen renovation there, went the conventional wisdom, and work your way up to designing new, single-family houses.

Not anymore. Remodeling projects are now lucrative enough to be the bread and butter of many a practice. As land grows scarcer and pricier, more and more potential new-home buyers are deciding to stay put and remodel rather than move. And, thanks to a booming national economy, they have more money than ever to

spend on their aging homes.

Ideas about what makes a good remodel are also evolving. Once, the highest compliment an architect could receive about a renovation or addition was, "It looks like it's always been there." Today's up-and-comers, however, are deliberately injecting older homes with unabashedly modern flavor.

For example, take a look at the homes in our story "Altered States," a portfolio of remodels by three young, talented firms (page 52). Clearly, the architects who transformed these houses aren't afraid to let a remodel be a remodel; they celebrate the new while respecting the old. Their attitude has helped remodeling gain stature within the design community. "Altered States" is *residential architect's* first major remodeling feature; watch for more remodeling coverage in future issues.

## universal language

Another story in this issue, "Universal Design" (page 66), also features remodeling projects. The emphasis here, though, is on the designers' skillful use of universal design principles. The four spaces shown



Katherine Lambert

were reworked for clients with special needs, but they function equally well for residents of any age, size, strength, or mobility. As proponents of universal design point out, making houses comfortable for as many people as possible is just plain common sense.

## international relations

As English CAD programs are translated into Japanese and e-mailed RFPs shoot from Chicago to Milan, an increasing number of American architects are spreading their businesses across the globe. In "Americans Abroad," by Rich Binsacca (page 76), some

of them share their diverse experiences with readers.

You'll find yet another view of the international experience on our back page, where architect Michael Pyatok's photo essay lauds the jubilant architectural haphazardness of four communities around the world.

## final analysis

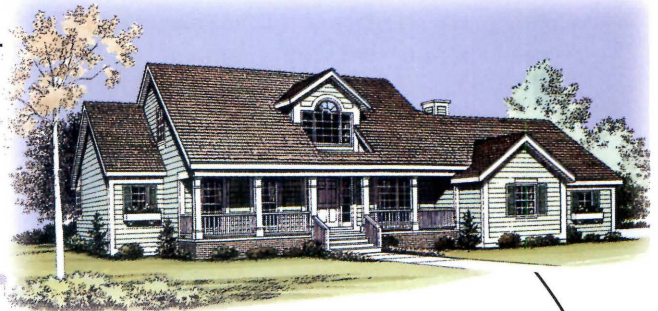
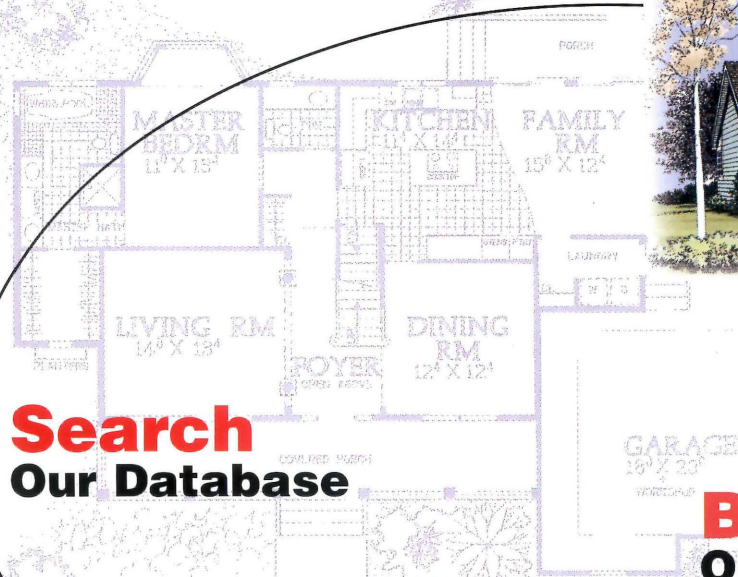
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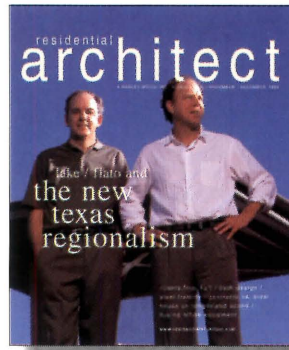
# l e t t e r s

keep those cards, letters, and e-mails coming, folks.

## regionalism: dead or alive?

(continued)

**a**bout regionalism: I agree with the people who wrote letters about this issue in your magazine (Letters, March, page 16). However, I think that architecture magazines also contribute in a major way to destroying regionalism when they emphasize extremely modern architecture. They sometimes make it seem that modernism is the only



style out there. Other styles are seldom praised, except for the occasional article on preservation—if it's done by a name-brand architect.

*Yvonne Vail, AIA*

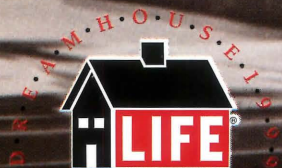
*Yvonne Vail AIA Architect  
Santa Cruz, Calif.*

## design rights

**I** am writing to talk about a problem that, as design architects, we at Seidel/Holzman have been struggling with for the last few years. As our firm forges into the territory of collaboration with multiple architects on the design team, we've found both clients and other architects not only ignorant but literally hostile to the idea of design as intellectual property protected by federal copyright law—as it so clearly is.

Consider, as an example, a major San Francisco firm that is now executing a \$14 million mixed-use project that we designed and entitled. The owner refused to obtain any rights to the design, and, of course, the architects of record neglected to inform us that they were utilizing our design to execute the project. So much for respect and collegiality.

Examples like this one, in my view, expose a viciously competitive and unprofessional side of what is usually thought of



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as a “gentleman’s profession.” Perhaps the inflated real estate market in California, and its associated profit potential, just brings out the worst in architects and developers. It certainly gives us misgivings about the environment in which we function.

We’d be interested in thoughts any other readers of your magazine have on this topic.

*Alexander Seidel, FAIA  
Seidel/Holzman  
San Francisco*

## watertight

I would like to point out an error in a caption in your May/June issue. The



article is about basement waterproofing (Doctor Spec, page 104). The photograph shows workers applying Poly-Wall foundation coating to a home in Montana. The coating is not “cement-based,” as the caption describes it. It is actually a thermoplastic-based coating. It is the first layer of a two-layer waterproofing system. The first layer provides a durable waterproof coating, serves as a “primer” for the

second layer, and reduces the possibility of bladdering. The second layer in this system is a self-adhesive sheet membrane.

*Ken Petersen  
Director of sales and marketing  
Poly-Wall International  
Blaine, Minn.*

## in proportion

I am writing in response to the article titled “Decorative Molding Debate” in the January/February issue (Doctor Spec, page 86).

The photo of the window with a pediment illustrates a problem much more basic than material selection. This designer needs to take instruction



from Alvin Holm in the same issue (“Making the Case for Classicism,” page 32) regarding proportions!

I am puzzled as to why wood was not considered in the material-selection debate. For running trim, it would certainly be a contender, both indoors and out. It’s warm to the touch and won’t dissolve.

*Ann Sutphin, AIA  
Ann Sutphin, Architect  
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Circle no. 23



# home front

tips and trends from the world of residential design

## in the zone

**m**inimalist lines and creative space solutions helped this Chicago renovation earn a 1998 Citation of Merit for Interior Architecture from the Chicago chapter of the AIA. Architect Sharlene Young, AIA, who is also the home's owner, conceived the 1,800-square-foot house as a series of interlocking, mixed-use zones.

The study, for example, often serves as an additional entertainment space and extension of the living/dining room. When Young and her husband want to use it as an office, they can close it off from the rest of the house with two fiberglass-

reinforced acrylic sliding panels. The translucent panels are riveted to a poplar frame and slide on recessed tracks.

To reduce labor and material costs, Young opted for prefabricated metal stair railings and columns throughout the home. She designed a two-story mahogany stairwell wall to visually unite the home's two floors, which before the renovation had been used as separate apartments.—*meghan drueding*



Photos: © Craig Dugan/Hedrich Blessing



Ernest Burden III/  
Robert A.M. Stern  
Architects

## multi talented

**t**hough Robert A.M. Stern is internationally known for designing large, single-family houses, he's not resting on his laurels. His first U.S. multifamily project, The Chatham, is under construction on Manhattan's Upper East Side. The 94-unit condominium will be ready for occupancy next summer.

Stern's 34-story plan calls for a limestone base with a Georgian-inspired brick façade and stone accents to complement the neighborhood's existing buildings. Apartments range from 1,093-square-foot one-bedroom units with libraries to 2,940-square-foot four-bedroom residences; duplex penthouses and full-floor





The apartment's kitchen (left) doubles as a casual eating area, and the study (right) can morph into a separate room with sliding acrylic panels. A two-story metal column and mahogany wall help tie together the first and second floors of the former two-flat (far left).

homes are also available.

In addition to designing the building, Stern selected the apartments' interior finishes, fixtures, flooring, and lighting. The units are priced from \$600,000 to more than \$6 million. The Chatham was 90 percent sold out within its first nine weeks on the market.—*deena shehata*



Courtesy Pentagram Design

The Chatham's exterior (far left) features a classical entrance and a distinctive rooftop silhouette. Inside, a model kitchen (left) sports polished-granite countertops and floors.



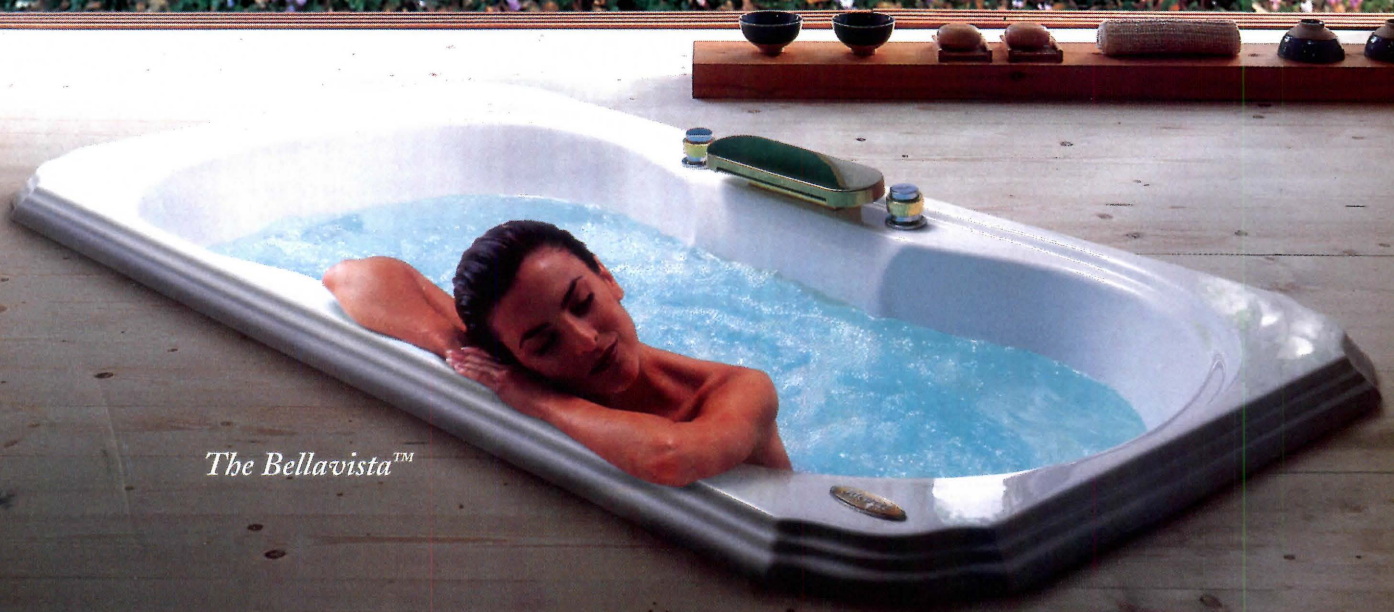
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Courtesy BuildingBlocks Interactive Corp.



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## calendar

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library of congress, washington, d.c.

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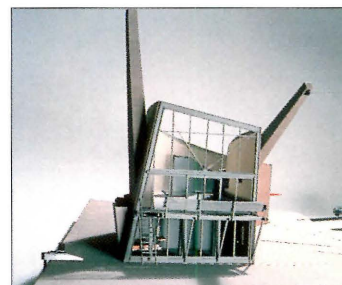
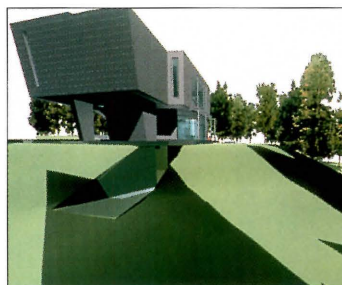
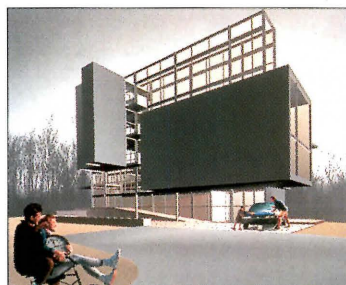
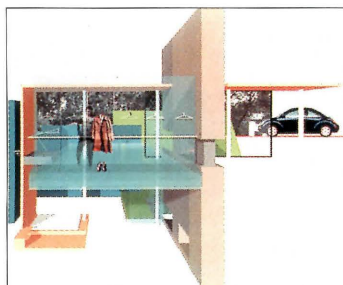
Courtesy Herman Miller

### the un-private house

july 1–october 5, 1999

museum of modern art, new york city

Twenty-six architects from around the globe present models, computer drawings, and interactive digital displays of the home as they see it today. Examples below represent the work of (from left) Joel Sanders, Hariri & Hariri, Winka Dubbeldam, and Diller + Scofidio.



Photos: Courtesy Museum of Modern Art

### asla annual meeting and expo

september 11–16, 1999

boston

Take garden tours, attend educational sessions, and view new landscaping-related products at the American Society of Landscape Architects' annual conference. Call 202.898.2444 for more information, or go to [www.asla.org](http://www.asla.org) on the Web.

### hugh newell jacobsen: a retrospective

through august 15, 1999

national building museum, washington, d.c.

Visit this exhibit of Jacobsen's work to see why the Washington-based architect is widely regarded as one of the top residential architects of his time.

Call 202.272.2448 for details, or visit [www.nbm.org](http://www.nbm.org).



Courtesy National Building Museum



Jeffrey Heyne, AIA

### boston society of architects design awards programs

entry deadlines: early August

The BSA's Architectural Design Honor Awards program is open to all Massachusetts architects—whose projects may be anywhere in the world—and to any architect who has designed a built project in Massachusetts. (At left is a winner from last year's Honor Awards by Jeffrey Heyne, AIA.) Additionally, the society's Annual Unbuilt Architecture Design Awards program is open to architects, architectural educators, and architectural students throughout the world. For guidelines on either program, call 617.951.1433, ext. 221; fax a request to 617.951.0845; or e-mail [bsarch@architects.org](mailto:bsarch@architects.org).



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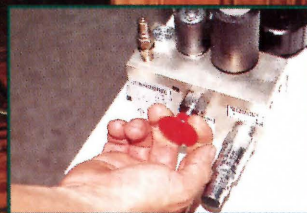
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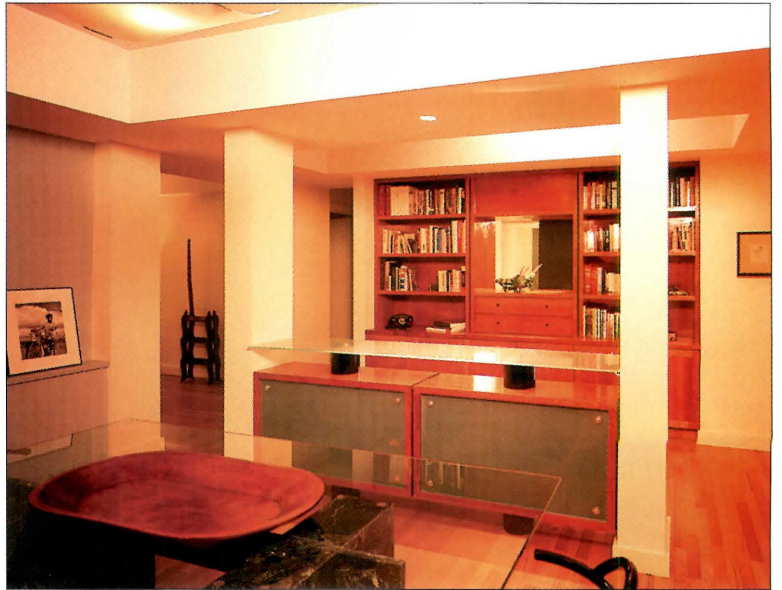
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## divide and conquer / three strategies for separating spaces large and small

**S**pace and natural light were at a premium in this Washington, D.C., apartment renovation (right). Architect Lance Hosey, AIA, replaced full walls with floating cabinets suspended between drywall pillars. “The base cabinets create a psychological separation between rooms without a physical one,” he says. Topping the cherry cabinets is a floating counter of sand-blasted glass; the cylinders supporting them are painted PVC.



Robert Kassabian



J.D. Peterson

**S**an Francisco architect Craig Steely wanted to bring more light into his dining room (above), but he didn’t want to enlarge the room’s entrance. “It’s an old house,” he says. “I wanted it to remain proportional.” Instead, he flanked the doorway with tall, fir-framed display cases that penetrate the walls, opening up sight lines between the dining room and the hallway. Steely illuminated the glass shelves with halogen lighting and tucked a single drawer into the base of each case.



Lea Babcock

**T**he reasoning behind this open-grid dining-room wall (above) is threefold, according to architect Jeffrey Scherer, FAIA, of Meyer Scherer & Rockcastle, in Minneapolis. The recycled-fir latticework subtly separates the dining room and entry hall while maintaining a sense of openness. It maximizes the flow of daylight, and it references other latticework detailing throughout the home. “The recycled fir costs about the same as nonrecycled does,” Scherer says. “But the ethical and environmental value is substantially more.”—*m.d.*



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## postcard from germany

**S**oon after the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, a newly unified Germany began a massive rebuilding program to repair and replace the country's crumbling slab housing. Some of this new housing has taken the form of ambitious, walkable towns ranging in style from modern to neotraditional. During my April 1999 visit to Germany, I saw several of these new towns around Potsdam and Berlin. To my eyes, the one with the most inviting and cohesive public spaces was Kirchsteigfeld, on the edge of Potsdam.

Planned by Berlin-based architect Robert Krier, the town is home to 6,000 inhabitants. Its streets are lined with two- to four-story multifamily buildings designed by American and European firms, including the London offices of Kohn Pedersen Fox and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and Moore Ruble Yudell, of Santa Monica, Calif.

Kirchsteigfeld's main plaza, Kirchplatz, is grand in scale but not overwhelming. At its center is a library, as well as the first new church built in Germany since the reunification. The plaza is ringed by grocery stores, restaurants, a drug store, offices, apartments, and some small shops.

Another very special public place in Kirchsteigfeld is the canal, Am Hirtengraben, that winds through the town. Lined with grassy banks and crossed by pedestrian-friendly bridges, this narrow, woodsy space offers a refreshing contrast to the urban streets and plaza.

Four schools satisfy the community's educational needs from kindergarten through high school. A state-of-the-art streetcar runs through town, with stops at the center plaza and the high school. Parking is provided inside the blocks and



Chris Hubbard

Kirchsteigfeld's brightly colored apartment complexes form a refreshing contrast to the oppressive, homogeneous housing of the Berlin Wall era.

along the streets in a combined parallel and perpendicular configuration. One troubling note: According to one of Kirchsteigfeld's property managers, the townspeople still choose to drive to the discount mall to do their shopping, rather than shop in the local stores.

After seeing endless slabs of anonymous, graffiti-covered housing from the years before the reunification, I'm inclined to think that, for its inhabitants, this town has to be a bright light at the end of a dark tunnel.

*Chris Hubbard is a principal of WHA Architecture and Planning, in Falls Church, Va., which specializes in walkable neighborhood architecture and planning.*

## reaching out

**T**he new Residential Engineers and Architects Council on Housing (REACH), initiated last fall by the NAHB Research Center, Upper Marlboro, Md., aims to strengthen ties between the design community and its home building brethren. A key component of REACH consists of easy (and cheap) access to a series of reports generated by Housing Affordability Through Design Efficiency, a research program that offers the latest information about building for high wind, seis-

mic, and other risky conditions.

"There's a lot of good research out there that no one knows about," says REACH program manager Deborah Adler. Armed with the most current information, she says, architects can best meet the needs and expectations of their builder clients and foster mutual respect.

But a REACH membership offers more than just a better grasp of shear walls and truss uplift. Benefits include a subscription to "HomeBase News," a

newsletter providing practical technical information, including an insert on recent technical advances and product performance; discounts on NAHB publications; and access to courses and forums. In addition, members are profiled in the "Catalog of Building Products" CD-ROM, which is distributed to more than 60,000 builders and remodelers three times a year. Cost to join: \$100 for NAHB members, \$125 for nonmembers. For more information, call 800.638.8556, ext. 512, or visit [www.nahbrc.org](http://www.nahbrc.org).—rich binsacca





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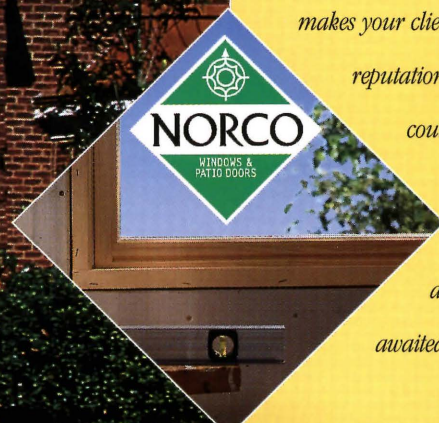


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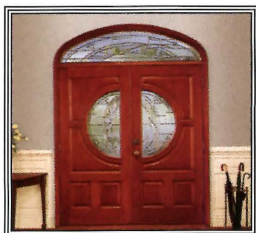
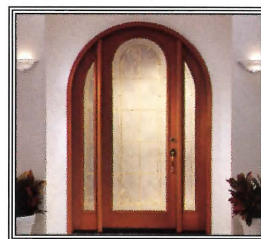




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# historic proportions

architect stephen tilly took on the daunting task  
of augmenting one of america's architectural treasures.

by stephen tilly, aia

In 1986, Philip Johnson gave the 40-plus-acre Connecticut property containing his Glass House to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, with the stipulation that the property be open to the public only after his death. When that time comes, the trust plans to provide tours originating in a visitors' center.

Both Mr. Johnson and the trust rejected the idea of having the architect design the center himself, since it was to be built posthumously. In part because of my firm's recent restoration and renovation efforts at Lyndhurst, a Gothic mansion in nearby Westchester County, N.Y., the trust tapped me in late 1997 to design the proposed visitors' center for Mr. Johnson's approval.

The trust introduced Mr. Johnson and me, and together we conspired about a project without a "real" client. My excitement shaded to trepidation, however, as I realized that my acceptance of the assignment meant that, conspiracies aside, *he* was my client. I was going to have to satisfy one of the most accomplished architects of the century.



Photos: Ezra Stoller © Esto



The author's challenge: Design a visitors' center for Philip Johnson's Glass House, in New Canaan, Conn. The house, above and left, will eventually be open for tours given by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

On our first visit to the site, Mr. Johnson referred to himself as "just a decorator." But he talked dimensions and trusses like the architect he is, and trees and site features like a landscape professional. He lamented the bulging platform-framed "McMan-

sions" that have sprouted in his neighborhood. And he pointed out context that might affect the center's design, including the suburban shopping plaza nearby and a shingled barn that related to his image for the center. He was receptive to my suggestions and repeat-

ed his desire to "stay out of the way," but I filed away his comments carefully.

## fuzzy prelude

After sketching and modeling in my studio, the concept I came up with for the visitors' center was that of

*continued on page 40*



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a “Flannel House”—a warmer, fuzzier prelude to the Glass House. My design would induce a stylistic softening up of the uninitiated before the bracing immersion they would experience in Mr. Johnson’s building. I proposed an unspoken “recycling” of the Glass House dimensions in the new plan, having discovered their close similarity to the size of old foundations where we would be building.

When I had finished a model, complete with alternate roof configurations, Mr. Johnson and I met in the kitchen of the Glass House to discuss the project’s progress. I set the model on the kitchen island counter and waited for a reaction.

“You did it!” he exclaimed, to my relief. Though he was “staying out of the way,” he had also been a *nervous* client, afraid he was going to have to put on his architect hat to get it right. He said he liked the gable roof because of its strength ... but then the hip roof because of its

shape ... and then back to the gable, and so on for a while. He liked the embedded Glass House dimensions. He was pleasantly surprised that we had included a prominent fireplace, despite the trust’s warning that it would be too expensive.

As we talked about the center’s design, I stole glances out at the property, feeling comfortably inside but at the same time closely in touch with the landscape. The house felt like a loft poised in the serene green hills, urbane yet rustic, tossing off its elegance. I had seen Mr. Johnson’s work only in photographs, and hadn’t considered

myself an acolyte of his. But the Glass House is persuasive! The man and his glass pavilion seem to me, on the slender basis of a few meetings with him, to be perfectly in tune. The home’s audacious transparency reflects his mischievousness, the clarity of its composition his intellect, and its subtle plan asymmetry his low-key informality.

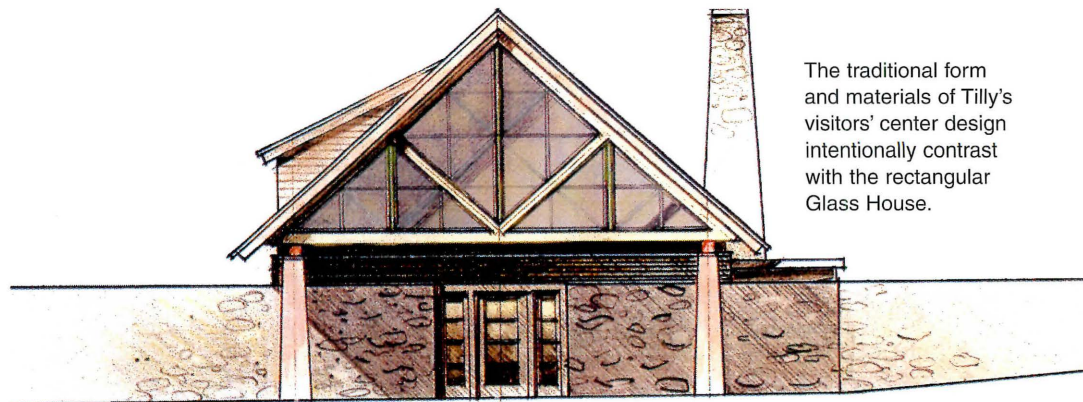
### neighboring dissent

I reveled in the rare opportunity to work with such a skilled, informed client as Philip Johnson. The glow of the experience persists, despite a haze that soon

overtook the project. NIMBY forces living near the proposed site came out in droves and smothered trust spokespeople, even though the local planning board itself was largely sympathetic.

Midway through the approval process, in the fall of 1998, the trust decided it would be easier to locate in an existing neighboring facility. The decision spared both client and architect those difficult choices that accompany a building’s development—but it also left us without the building!

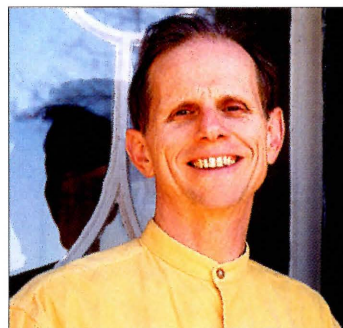
Just another day, I suppose, in the lives of two residential architects. *ra*



The traditional form and materials of Tilly’s visitors’ center design intentionally contrast with the rectangular Glass House.

Stephen Tilly

“the house felt like a loft  
poised in the serene green  
hills, urbane yet rustic,  
tossing off its elegance.”



Courtesy Stephen Tilly, Architect

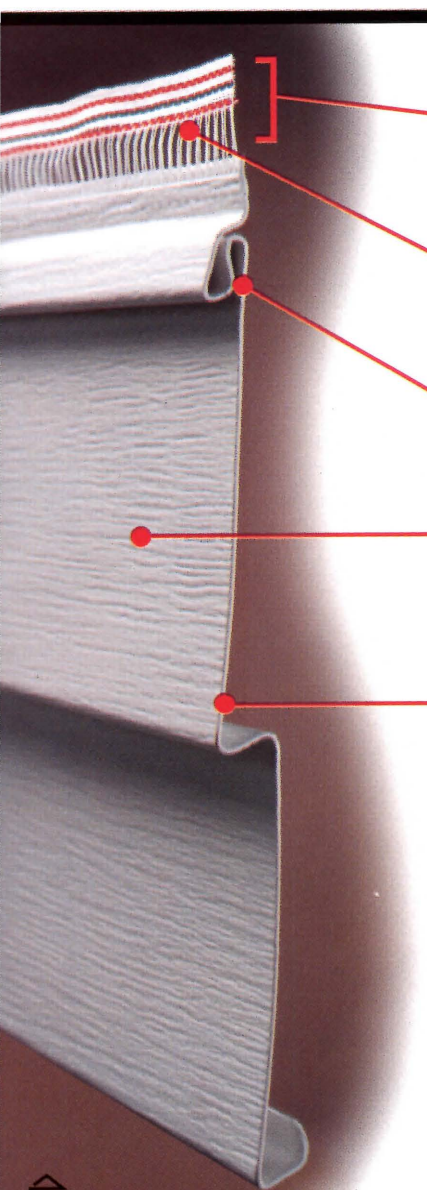
*Stephen Tilly, AIA, is an architect in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. A major portion of his firm’s work consists of the preservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings and landscapes.*





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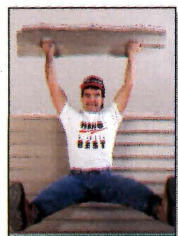
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# in agreement

how to develop a written residential contract that works for you *and* your clients.

by charles r. heuer, faia

**a** written contract is crucial for residential design and construction projects. By recording up front the parties' assumptions and commitments, such a document can minimize later disagreements about what was promised and what is required. Misunderstandings, as we all know, waste resources and goodwill. No one would argue with that—but what, exactly, should the agreement cover, and how should you go about developing one?

Many residential architects may be surprised to learn that an agreement form already exists. The AIA's new flagship owner/architect agreement, B141-1997, is a standardized-form contract that residential architects can tailor to suit their needs. It comes in two parts, "terms and conditions" and "scope of services."

## an interview checklist

Actually, B141-1997 can be helpful in eliciting basic information about the project and the client, even if it is not used as the actual contract. Specifically, the first few pages of the form

prompt for information about:

- the physical and legal parameters of the site;
- a written program for the project;
- design and construction budgets;
- applicable time parameters;
- construction procurement methods (for example, bidding);
- other project consultants working for the client, such as interior designers; and
- consultants to the architect.

Even if you do nothing more than use B141-1997 as an interview checklist, it will help you and your client reach a common understanding.

## terms and conditions

Unlike a project's scope of services—which can vary widely from project to project and from firm to firm—terms and conditions should remain relatively consistent. In addition to checklist information, the first part of B141-1997 covers the following ground. (If you use a different agreement, make sure it addresses these same topics.)

**1. The owner's responsibilities.** Most clients would be glad to do their part if only they knew what that was. Residential clients in particu-

lar often need guidance.

## 2. Provisions dealing with construction costs.

It's fair to expect an architect to design in accordance with a budget, but it's not fair to expect that he or she can control what contractors bid for the construction. All changes requested by clients should be documented, with a statement specifically indicating that the change will have an effect (up or down) on the cost of the work. Just because a change adds square feet doesn't mean the client knows it will cost more, or that he or she understands that you

*continued on page 46*



Illustration: David Plunkert



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haven't balanced the additional cost with a deletion somewhere else.

### 3. Use of the architect's work product.

Unless otherwise specifically stated, the architect owns the copyright in the documents produced and can control essentially all future use of them. Generally, design and construction documents are not appropriate for other sites or projects, and such use should be restricted.

### 4. Provisions for identifying and paying for changes in services.

Before you perform additional services, explain them explicitly and always try to obtain written approval that specifically cites the associated change in compensation.

### 5. Dispute resolution.

Litigation should generally not be the first resort in resolving a dispute with the client or others. Mediation and arbitration are usually less costly—and less hostile—alternatives to consider.

Mediation is a nonbinding procedure that can be used prior to litigation or arbitration. A mediator tries to help the parties resolve their dispute in a mutually agreeable manner. He or she has no power to impose a decision on the parties, however. A successful mediation eliminates the need for arbitration or litigation.

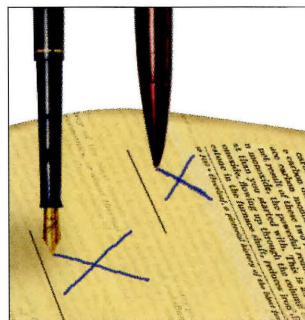
Arbitration has been favored in the design and construction industry

“be clear about when payments are due, and get money on deposit.”

because arbitrators are more likely to understand design and construction practices and standards than are judges and juries unfamiliar with the industry. Arbitration is used in lieu of litigation and is binding. Arbitrators' decisions are usually final and unappealable.

**6. Termination/suspension.** May the client terminate the agreement for convenience or only for cause? Similarly, what grounds must the architect have to terminate? The client expects you to perform in accordance with the professional standard of care (that is, as well as could reasonably be expected of an architect practicing under the same circumstances). You, in turn, expect to be paid on time; you should retain the right to suspend services if you are not. Both parties must perform as agreed.

**7. Amount of compensation.** Whatever the method of compensation you select, be clear about it. Note, however, that “hourly to a limit” is probably the worst method you



could choose. By that method, if all goes well, you receive only your hourly rate. If difficulties arise, your pay is further limited. Why not take a stipulated sum instead? You won't do any worse than under the hourly limit approach, and you could make a bigger profit if you're efficient.

**8. Payment terms, including an initial payment.** Just as with the amount of compensation, be clear about when payments are due, and get money on deposit. Abraham Lincoln is said to have required an initial payment from his clients because then “the client knew he had a lawyer and I knew I had a client.”

### scope of services

When it comes to describing services and process, it's impossible to find a single preprinted agreement that reflects each architect's personal preferences. So, just write down what you intend to do and how you intend to do it. You can still employ B141-

1997; simply discard its second part (the detailed scope of services) and replace it with the one you've prepared. This is an entirely appropriate and planned-for use of the AIA agreement, and it allows you to continue to use the industry standard to add credibility to your presentation.

When writing your scope of services agreement, be sure to keep certain cautions in mind.

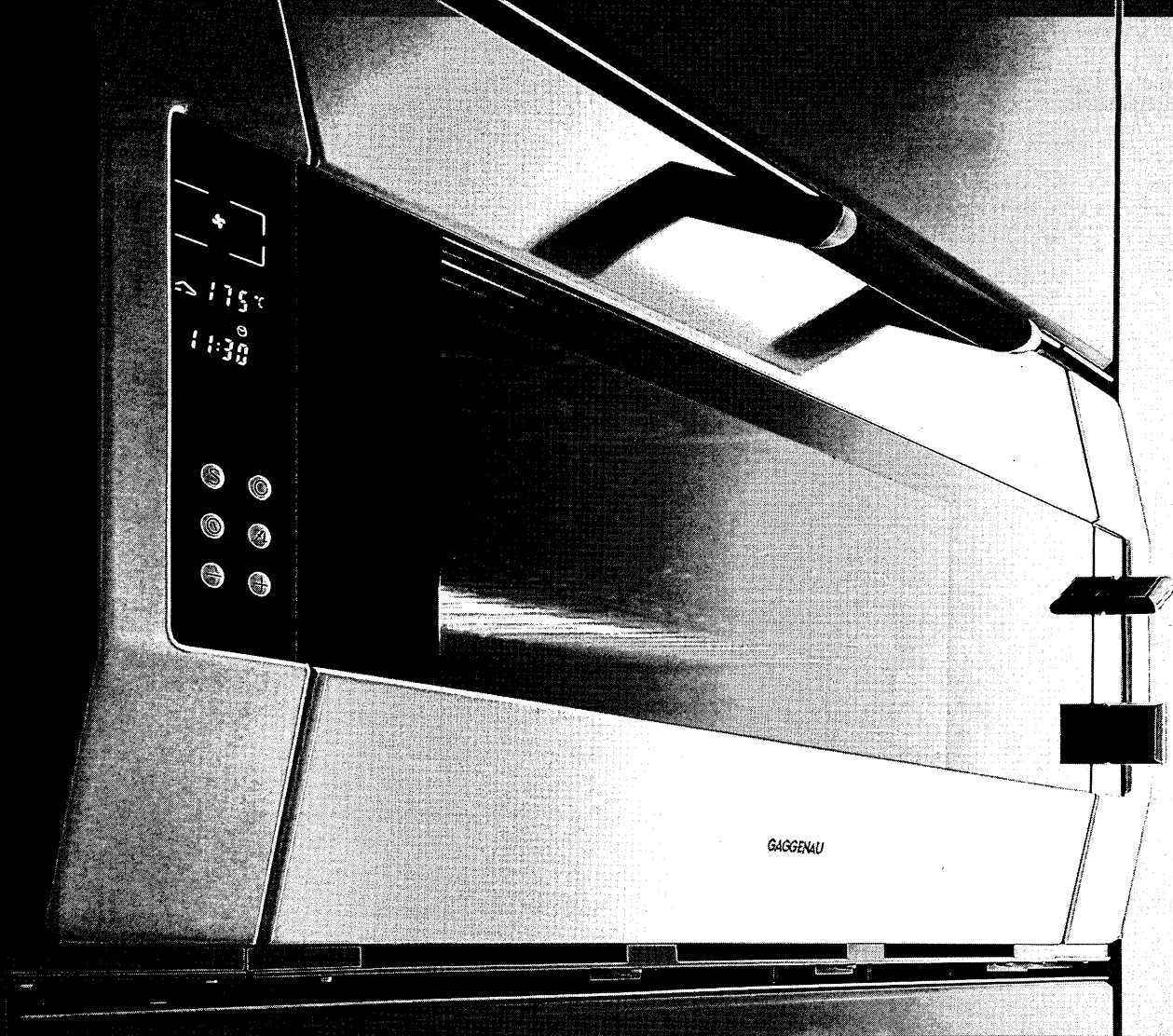
First, avoid providing design services without providing construction contract administration services as well. If your drawings are used without your involvement during construction, your exposure to professional liability problems increases. Even if changes are made and the construction documents are ignored, if something goes wrong, chances are you will be implicated. And you won't have been there to observe what really happened.

If the client refuses to pay for construction administration services, the agreement should state that the client shall release, defend, and indemnify the architect with respect to the following:

- changes made to the construction documents by anyone other than the architect;
- failure by the contractor to build in accordance with the construction documents;
- any aspect of the work

*continued on page 48*





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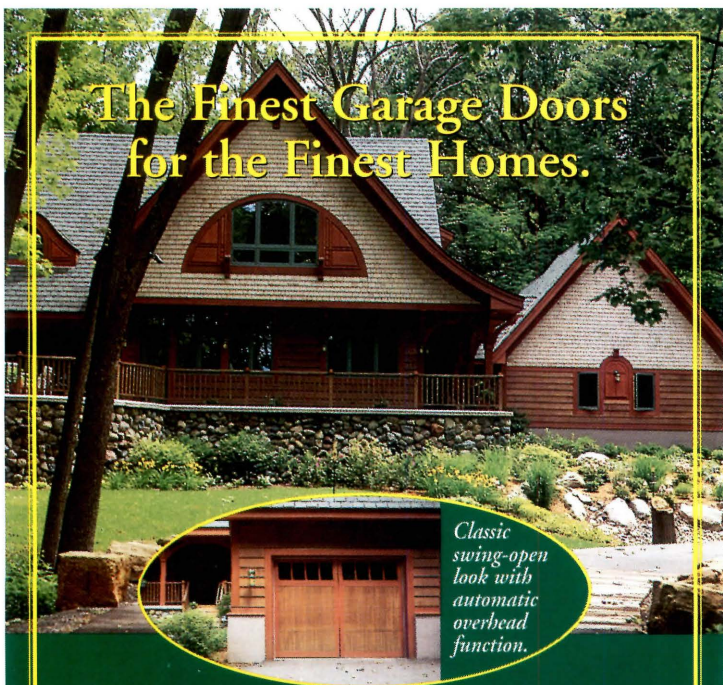
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## practice

affected by the lack of the architect's review of shop drawings, product data, or samples; and

■ errors or omissions, if any, on the part of the architect that would reasonably have been caught and corrected had the architect provided construction-phase services.

These provisions control claims by the client as well as third parties and require the client to pay for the architect's defense should the architect become embroiled in litigation between the owner and the contractor.

A corollary to the foregoing is to be wary of observing construction "on call" or "as needed." If you are called to the site and don't know fully what went on before you arrived, the chances of giving poor advice based on incomplete data are inordinately high.

In addition to refusing a contract that doesn't include construction administration services, don't accept contract provisions that seem to make commitments but are in truth merely illusory. For example: "The services of a structural engineer will be provided if needed and approved by the owner." What if you decide you need a structural consultation and the owner won't pay? The need doesn't disappear, and your inability to do it yourself doesn't change. The only choice is

to pay the engineer out of your fee, which is clearly not the preferred solution.

## working with couples

Finally, if you're working with a married couple, insist that both husband and wife sign the contract, and make it clear that you are entitled to rely upon whatever either of them tells you. It should be their responsibility to decide what they want. You don't want to find yourself in a situation where, for example, the husband says he won't pay even though the wife explicitly asked for something.

People who want to hire a residential architect should expect to sign an agreement and commit funds, just as in any other substantial transaction. If the written agreement is fair and clear, both parties will benefit. **ra**

*Charles R. Heuer, FAIA, Esq., is an architect and an attorney at law. He is principal of The Heuer Law Group and of Covenants, a management consulting practice. Both firms have offices in Cambridge, Mass., and Charlottesville, Va.*

**Editor's note:** For a copy of form B141-1997, contact your local AIA chapter. (If you don't know your chapter's telephone number, call 1.800.365.ARCH for assistance.)



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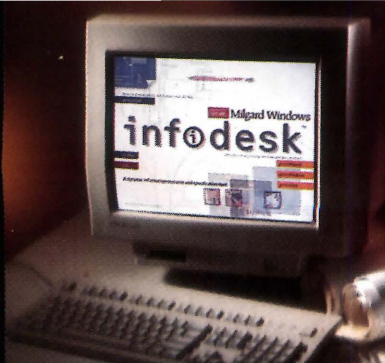
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# *altered*

three very different projects  
realize a common goal of remodeling:  
a home that embraces its owners' lifestyles.

by meghan drueding

## *welcome* addition

Seamless additions that look like part of the original house aren't Alexandria, Va., architect Bob Gurney's style. Neither are irrelevant, Bauhaus-on-farmhouse ones. "When I'm doing an addition, I want to celebrate the fact that it's a new part of the house," he says. "But I also want to be sure to honor the existing structure."

The existing structure in this case was a 19th-century farmhouse in Lovettsville, Va., an exurb of Washington, D.C. The farmhouse, itself a

renovation of a 1700s log cabin, had a charming old stone foundation, a covered front porch, and a beautiful wooded site. The dilapidated southeast corner of the house, however, which rests four steps lower than the rest of the building, posed several problems.

The only connection between the lower corner and the central part of the house was a half set of stairs. The first-floor rooms, a study and a TV room, were dark and rarely used. To get to a bath-





# states





# altered states

room from the loft bedroom, one had to go downstairs to the first-floor bath. And the bedroom ceiling was on the verge of falling in.

The owners asked Gurney to change this part of the house into a more purposeful space. They wanted the loft to be made over into a master bedroom, and they requested a family room with a fireplace where residents and guests could gather comfortably.

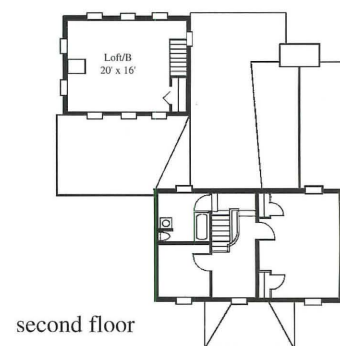
The architect started by demolishing the entire southeast portion of the house, saving only the stone foundation. "Leaving the foundation intact was our way of deferring to the original house," he says. Gurney then designed a rebuilt wing containing what the clients had asked for: downstairs, a large, light-filled family room with a central fireplace and built-in cabinets for a TV, stereo, and other entertainment equipment; upstairs, a new master bedroom suite with a master bath.

Gurney balanced the old and new portions of the house by introducing elements of the farmhouse into the addition, reinterpreting them to give the newly built wing a personality of its own. The wing is clad in clapboard siding, just like the existing house. But it's painted barn red, a hue that establishes the addition's separate identity while acknowledging the old farmhouse's roots.

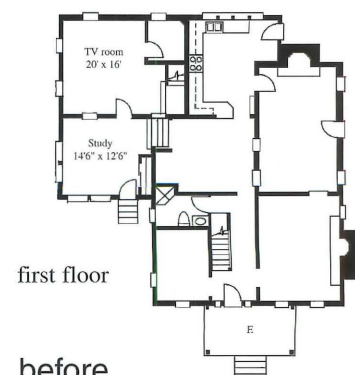
The addition's double-hung windows echo the size and proportion of those in the main house. Its shed dormer, as well, evokes those on the existing building. And black, standing-seam metal roofs top both the



Photos: © Hoachlander Davis Photography



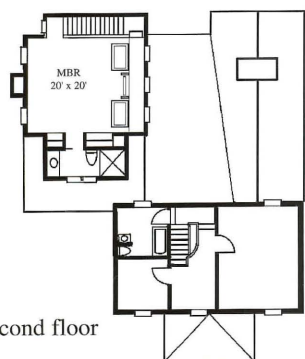
second floor



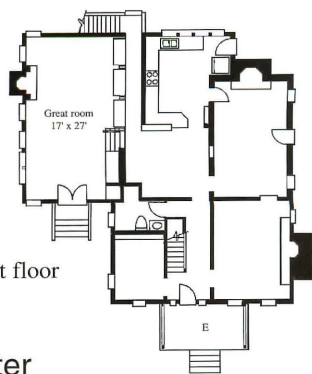
first floor

before





second floor



first floor

after

To allow light to flow more easily throughout the addition, the architect pulled the staircase out to the back of the building (above left and plan). The stair is raised a few feet so as not to break into the foundation; it can be entered from the north/south hallway that forms a border between the main house and the addition (above right).

project:  
Farmhouse addition,  
Lovettsville, Va.  
architect:  
Robert M. Gurney, Architect,  
Alexandria, Va.  
general contractor:  
Foster/Herz, Hamilton, Va.

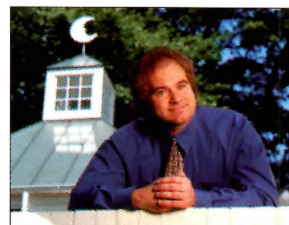
old house and the new wing. The addition's sleek, metal-clad chimney, however, departs from the farmhouse's massive stone ones. And interspersed with the more traditional double-hung windows are thoroughly modern, fixed-glass, floor-to-ceiling units. "Fixed glass is a cost-effective way of getting more glass—and light—into the project," Gurney says. "There's no frame to add expense."

Inside the addition, the architect took his cue from the existing house's interior and used wood as the dominant material. As in the farmhouse, chunky columns and ceiling rafters lend rooms warmth and definition. Cleanly detailed cabinets and a decidedly modern fireplace surround (far left) take on more contemporary forms.

The floors are inexpensive sealed roffers (pine boards typically used in roof sheathing). Four different types of wood—mahogany, heart pine, Douglas fir, and the roffers—dress up the addition's interior, creating a subtly varied mix of shades and textures.

Now that the project is finished, Gurney sees in it a historical record of sorts.

"I envision the entire house as a sort of time line," he muses. "You have the old building dating from the 1800s. Now, the addition contributes another century to the home's identity."



Katherine Lambert

**robert m. gurney,**  
architect  
*alexandria, va.*

The offices of Robert M. Gurney, Architect, located in the Old Town section of Alexandria, Va., appear unassuming enough. But they're the site of a three-person practice (including Gurney's wife, interior designer Therese Baron Gurney) that churns out about 15 projects a year. Most of the work is residential; much of it wins awards. The nine-year-old firm is known for graceful, modern additions and renovations that don't miss a beat when it comes to connecting with the original house.

Those remodels compose 80 percent of Gurney's residential work, much of which is in nearby Washington, D.C. "The advantage of remodeling in a dense metropolitan area is that the house usually gives you something to respond to—neighborhood context, site concerns, existing building elements," he says. "Of course, that can sometimes work as a constraint, as well."

The firm has also designed new houses up and down the East Coast and some light commercial projects. Gurney tries to keep as many smaller projects on his plate as he can, for reasons many an architect can relate to. "Smaller projects keep me in touch with the importance of detailing and material selection," he says. "Also, they have a faster turnaround time—you get more of an instant gratification."



*altered states*





# *boston* uncommon



Machado/Blake transformed a standard sleeping wing (above) into a dynamic set of spaces connected by an asymmetrically curved hall (left).

*"in a time when everything seems  
so ephemeral, we're trying to instill  
a sense of permanence."*

—madalena machado

Madalena Machado and Christopher Blake, AIA, of Machado/Blake Design have devoted the majority of their practice to residential work, a large part of which tends to be remodeling jobs. "The Northeast is a great market for remodels," says Blake, a principal at the Somerville, Mass., firm. "There are so many old neighborhoods here where people buy because they like the area, not necessarily the house." Such was the case with this mundane 1950s ranch house in suburban Boston—"an undecorated box," as Blake describes it.

As with all their projects, the pair acted as architect, general contractor, and furniture designer. "Carrying out the job through the final construction stages gives us control over costs and quality of the finished product," says Machado.

The renovation was to happen in two phases, so that the architects could concentrate on the home's public and private sections individually. Phase one, the sleeping wing, is shown here; it entailed creating a more inviting master suite and children's rooms. The owners asked Machado and Blake for a place where they could truly retreat from their high-stress professional lives. (Construction on phase two—which entails renovation of the entry, kitchen, living room, and dining room—

began this past spring.)

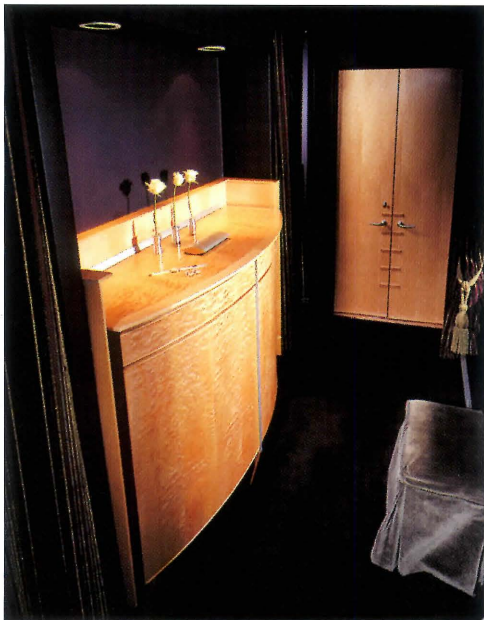
The architects began by separating the wing's various spaces in visually interesting ways. The original spine connecting it to the main house had been a long, dark corridor with standard plaster walls. Machado and Blake relieved its starkness with natural materials and enhanced lighting. A curved cherry wall on the hallway side of the owners' bath adds warmth while creating a sense of movement (opposite page). Inside the bath, small track lights shine through sandblasted glass windows atop the wall, gently illuminating the hall. Cherry double doors separate the hallway, dressing room, and master bedroom.

Machado and Blake rearranged the master bath and the dressing room in subtle but effective ways. They turned the bathtub 45 degrees and pushed it out a few feet to provide the owners with more tub-counter space. A new, lacewood double-sided closet in the center of the dressing room gives the clients twice the storage they had before and makes use of unneeded floor space.

In the master bedroom, the architects raised the formerly flat ceiling into a high barrel vault. "The rest of the ceilings are low, 7 feet 8 inches, and we left them that way," says Blake. "That way, the clients would feel a dramatic differ-



# altered states



© Greg Premru Photography



Custom furniture and built-ins designed by the architects include a double-sided dressing room closet (left, top and bottom) and a lace-wood bed and armoire (above and right).







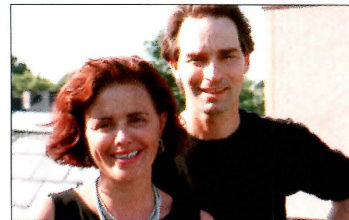
ence when they walked into their bedroom.” Leaving most of the ceilings in place also saved money, freeing up more of the budget for luxurious materials and finishes.

Machado and Blake redid the master bedroom’s wood-manteled fireplace with an inset marble-slab accent and an asymmetrical mantelpiece of anodized steel. A quirky, narrow window to the left of the fireplace replaces a standard unit and lets in light without compromising the room’s cocoonlike sense of privacy. The architects designed the built-in closets, dresser, bed, and armoire, and had local craftspeople execute the designs in lacewood and cherry. The two children’s bedrooms received cosmetic make-overs, complete with custom built-in furniture and window and wall treatments.

With phase one complete, the owners enjoy a private oasis in which to bathe, dress, recharge, and sleep—in style.

project:  
Ranch renovation, Andover,  
Mass.

architect/general contractor:  
Machado/Blake Design,  
Somerville, Mass.



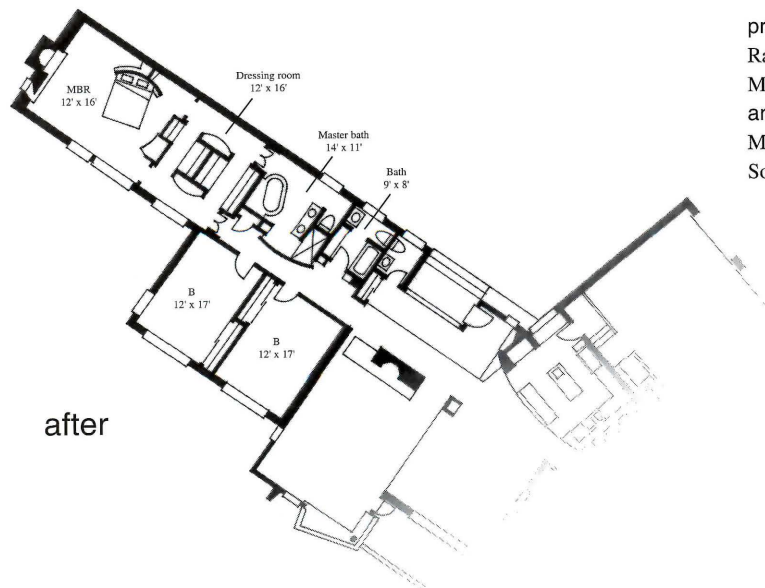
Courtesy Machado/Blake Design

**machado/blake design**  
*somerville, mass.*

When it comes to the execution of their designs, Madalena Machado and Christopher Blake like to be in control. Both worked for various large Boston firms for 15 years, and in 1995 both decided that focusing purely on residential work was the best way to obtain that control. So they formed Machado/Blake Design, a residential practice that offers general contracting and furniture design in addition to full architectural services.

“Designing houses gives us the chance to embrace and celebrate day-to-day activities,” says Machado. And staying involved with a project from the first blueprint to the last drawer pull allows the firm to take on a luxuriously small number of commissions per year—five is the average, says Blake. The Machado/Blake staff consists of four architects, including the principals, and one intern.

The firm’s work shows an attention to detail that’s rare even in the custom-house arena. Finishes of the highest grades available, imaginatively used materials, and carefully selected color schemes are a few of the hallmark details that elevate the quality of Machado/Blake’s projects. “In a time when everything seems so ephemeral,” Machado explains, “we’re trying to instill a sense of permanence in the homes we design.”



after



*altered states*





# outside chance



Glass accordion doors (left and below) replaced the original home's conventional windows and front door (above). Open or closed, they provide sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean.



*"the problem with the original house was that despite its great placement, you never really knew you were on the ocean."*

—Taal Safdie

The 1,800-square-foot San Diego cottage was the perfect size for its owner, a writer who works from home. Its mountaintop location and gated entrance gave her the privacy she needed. And its Spanish tile roof, white stucco walls, and wrought-iron detailing lent it the romantic, mission-style character she favored.

But the home had a major flaw: its failure to exploit the full potential of this idyllic site. "The problem with the original house was that despite its great placement, you never really knew you were on the ocean," says architect Taal Safdie of Safdie Rabines Architects, in San Diego. "Our challenge was to keep the small scale that made the cottage so appealing in the first place, but establish a better relationship between the inside and outside spaces."

The home's original floor plan contained small, side-by-side kitchen and dining room spaces and a large living room, with a master suite sandwiched in between. A cramped entrance corridor blocked the sun entering the house from the south side. Serving refreshments from the kitchen to guests in the living room required a trek from one end of the house to the other. "The old kitchen was dark and narrow, just sort of shoved into the back of the

house," Safdie says. The setup was hardly conducive to the lifestyle of the owner, an avid cook and entertainer.

Safdie and her partner, Ricardo Rabines, eliminated these drawbacks by switching the locations of the kitchen and master suite and combining the kitchen and dining room. They deleted the entrance hall, moving the front door to the east side to establish a more logical flow up from the entry gate farther down the mountain.

The pair demolished most of the interior walls to allow natural light to spread throughout the house. Instead of walls, they used different ceiling and floor heights to visually differentiate the three main rooms. They pushed the new kitchen/dining room ceiling up to the roofline and defined it with particleboard beams. "We were going to paint the kitchen ceiling white," Safdie recalls. "But the natural color of the particleboard warmed the space so well that we decided to leave it alone." The living room, by contrast, has a flat white ceiling crossed at broad intervals with wooden beams (opposite page). Its floor is 18 inches lower than the kitchen's, which in turn sits a foot lower than the master bedroom's.

Safdie and Rabines' rule of thumb for the home's interior/exterior relationship was simple: The less separation, the



# altered states



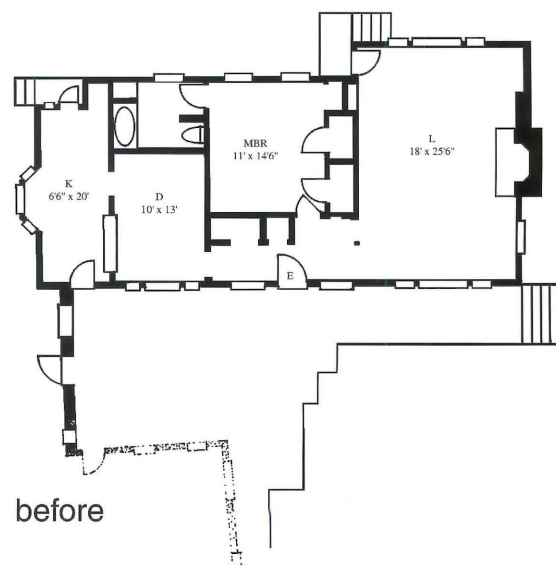
Attractive, durable poured-concrete counters and stainless steel appliances make for a low-maintenance, highly functional kitchen (above, right, and far right). Under-counter niches and glass knick-knack shelves provide extra storage space.



Photos: © John Durant

*“sometimes, the challenge of giving an old house new life forces us to come up with really unusual solutions.”*

—Taal Safdie







better. The architects replaced the dining and living room windows with glass accordion doors so that each room can be opened up to ocean views. "There wasn't enough wall space to use pocket doors, and these function in much the same way," says Safdie. An accordion window above the kitchen sink frames the bougainvillea outside. And, in the master bath, a wall of glass block with an operable window brings in yet more natural light and air.

In selecting the home's flooring, Safdie and Rabines sought a material that would further blur the distinction between inside and out. They chose continuous poured concrete, acid-stained for an aged, irregular patina. The seamless material covers the floors in every room, including the master bath; it extends outside as well, to a newly formed patio and dining pavilion. **ra**

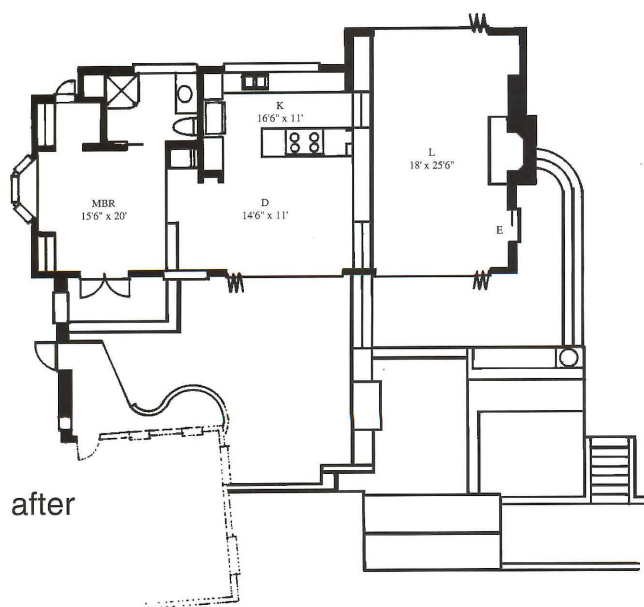


Courtesy Safdie Rabines Architects

## safdie rabines architects *san diego*

When Taal Safdie and Ricardo Rabines formed Safdie Rabines Architects in New York City in 1995, residential remodels made up the bulk of their work. Four years later, they've added five more staff members and moved the entire operation across the country to San Diego. The firm now takes on about 15 commissions per year, most of which are still residential in nature. With nods to both East and West Coast influences, they fill each home they design with clean, modern lines and light- and view-filled spaces.

Due to the high demand for new homes in Southern California, the amount of remodeling projects that makes up the firm's workload has dipped to 30 to 40 percent. But the principals—who collaborate as head architects on most projects—say their appetite for remodeling hasn't lessened. "Sometimes, the challenge of giving an old house new life forces us to come up with really unusual solutions," Safdie says. "That's when we like it the most." Current projects range in scope from a mixed-use development at the University of California at San Diego to a Los Angeles residential remodel.



project:  
Cottage makeover, San Diego  
architect:  
Safdie Rabines Architects,  
San Diego  
general contractor:  
Harold McGriff Contracting,  
San Diego



# 2000 Custom Home Design Awards

The eighth annual CUSTOM HOME Design Awards, sponsored by CUSTOM HOME magazine, honors the country's finest custom homes. There are seven entry categories, including custom homes of all sizes, custom kitchens and baths, renovations, and custom details. One of the winning projects will be chosen as the Best Overall Custom Home of 2000.



## Who can enter?

- custom home builders
- remodeling contractors
- architects
- developers
- planners
- kitchen and bath specialists
- other industry professionals

## Entry Form and Fee Deadline

**November 12, 1999**

## What can you enter?

- Any custom home completed after January 1, 1997, is eligible.
- An individual house designed and built to the unique specifications of a custom client on the client's lot.
- Entries should represent truly custom construction.

## How do you win?

A panel of respected building professionals independently selects winners based on the quality of design, function and craftsmanship. **All winning projects will be featured in the March 2000 issue of CUSTOM HOME.**

## Call For Entries

To register, you have 3 options:

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- MAIL this form to Deena Shehata, 2000 CUSTOM HOME Design Awards, One Thomas Circle, N.W., Suite 600 Washington, D.C. 20005.
- FAX this form to Deena Shehata at (202) 785-1974.

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Entries

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Categories

1. Custom Home less than 3,000 sq. ft.
2. Custom Home 3,000 to 5,000 sq. ft.
3. Custom Home more than 5,000 sq. ft.
4. Custom Kitchen
5. Custom Bath
6. Renovation (residential remodeling and additions)
7. Custom Details (a specific detail from a custom home)

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## → We won't bore you with the data on baby boomers

getting older and facing diminishing mobility. Nor will we get into the details of how many people survive—but are disabled by—accidents and illnesses that would have killed them 10 years ago. And we probably don't need to remind you how few households actually look like the old nuclear family of two 30-something adults and 2.5 kids.

Instead, let's just say that few people match the mythical "averages" that drive nearly all architectural standards. Hence, universal design.

As its name implies, universal design strives to make buildings work for everyone, regardless of size, strength, and abilities.

As an architect, you rely on your exceptional ability to visualize in three dimensions when you design. Universal design challenges you to go a step further and visualize not only space, but how people will move through that space over time. Visualize your client carrying groceries from the car to the refrigerator. Visualize your client's grandson or grandmother making a snack or getting a drink, not just before dinner but at mid-morning and at midnight. Visualize them moving—without their glasses on—from the bed to the bath-

room, stepping inside the shower, and turning on the water.

Visualize them doing that 20 years from now.

Many of the best designers already do this kind of visualization. For them, making spaces universally usable doesn't mean compromising aesthetics. It means thinking a little harder, making a few more sketches, and finding a better solution. Universal design, say its proponents, is just another way of saying good design.

On the following pages are four projects—a kitchen, a bathroom, a home office, and an exterior entrance—that incorporate universal design principles. All four clients had special requirements, yet their homes don't cry out "special needs." They're visually appealing and comfortable—for everyone.

# universal

homes that work for everybody





**Pull-out work surfaces and open shelves** help this kitchen adapt to users, instead of the other way around. (For more on this project, turn the page.)

John Bessler, courtesy McGraw-Hill

# design

by paul j. donio

omes that work for everybody · h

residential architect / july · august 1999

[www.residentialarchitect.com](http://www.residentialarchitect.com)

67



A second sink with a pull-out faucet occupies the same low stretch of counter as the cooktop, enabling the client to fill pots with water while seated at the range.

Knee space below the cooktop allows a wheelchair to slide underneath. A hutch, a pantry, and lots of extra storage in the breakfast room (opposite page) compensate for the loss of cabinetry here.



Photos: John Bessler, courtesy McGraw-Hill

Between the cooktop and the refrigerator (above), below the wall oven (previous page), and in the hutch (opposite page, left), pull-out shelves supply below-standard-height work surfaces. One of them is also a cutting board.

The refrigerator is the type with its freezer in a drawer at the bottom. It's fairly small for the size of the kitchen, so a second unit in the breakfast room works for both backup storage and beverage service while entertaining.



Next to the dishwasher, a shelf accessory pulls out and rotates, making use of a blind corner.

Tambour doors and open shelves under these standard-height counters provide easy-to-reach storage space.

Glasses and dishes are easier to reach in this hutch than they would be in a wall cabinet. Pull-outs aid in loading and unloading.

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A small table near the refrigerator folds up out of the way.

## the kitchen

The client, says Brookfield,

Conn., kitchen designer Mary Jo Peterson, is a “dynamo.”

An executive who uses a wheelchair, she and her husband like to cook and entertain. They requested a kitchen that would accommodate both of them as well as their guests. Working with architect David C.S. Polk, AIA, Peterson responded with two rooms: a main work area with plenty of space for maneuvering, and an adjacent breakfast room with a laundry area.

project:

kitchen remodel

kitchen designer:

Mary Jo Peterson, CKD, CBD, Brookfield, Conn.

architect: David C.S. Polk, AIA, Philadelphia

cabinetmaker:

David J. Wothers, East Greenville, Pa.

contractor:

R.E. Stevens Construction, Bala Cynwyd, Pa.



The main kitchen table sits between two built-in banquettes. The client transfers from the wheelchair to the seat, so the **table is reinforced with angled brackets** that allow plenty of knee space underneath.

Drawers help make up for lost storage elsewhere.

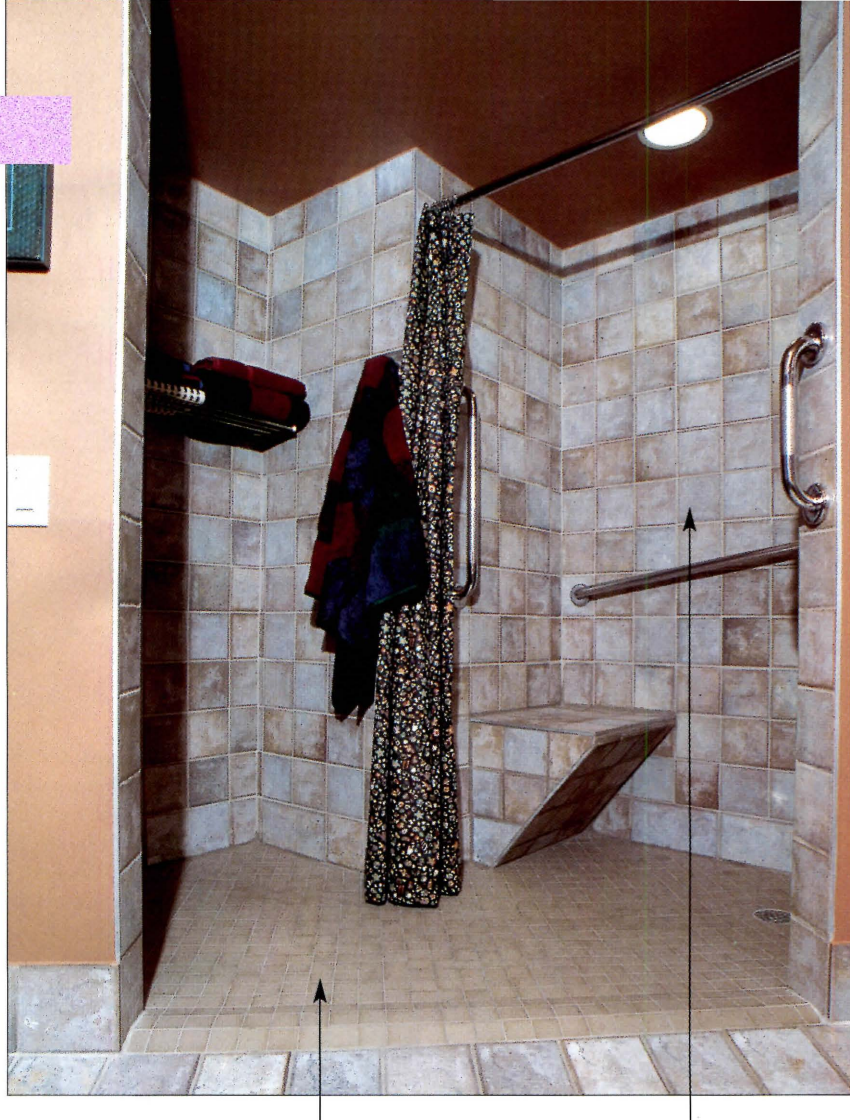
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# the bath

The client, a young man with multiple sclerosis, moved to this conveniently located condo to live independently. Because he uses a scooter, he needed his bathroom to be made completely accessible. Interior designer Irma Dobkin, of Bethesda, Md., managed to remodel the space without moving the waste lines in the existing slab. Plus, her design proved to be appealing enough to wow a condo association board that initially feared for the unit's resale value.

project:  
bathroom remodel  
designer:  
Irma Dobkin, ASID, Bethesda, Md.  
contractor:  
Richard Wilner, Wilner Construction, Glen Echo, Md.



The sink projects out of an 18-inch laminate top, and the **mirror is tilted slightly forward** so the client can see himself shave while seated.

**Drawers on either side of knee space** put everything within the client's reach.



Photos: Bill Lebovich, courtesy McGraw-Hill

The new shower drains where the old tub did, but it's **curbless and big enough to be split into two parts**. In one, the client parks the scooter; in the other, he sits on a bench while showering. Dobkin raised the whole room's floor level so that she could make the shower floor pitch down to the existing drain without adding a curb. The thresholds to the shower and at the main doorway are tilted about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch—not too much for the scooter to handle. Dobkin worked with tile contractor Dennis Montillo to work out this complex mudset installation.

Dobkin tore out all the bathroom's existing walls and replaced them with moisture-resistant **drywall over  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch plywood**. The plywood supplies solid backing for **grab bars**—including any that might be added in the future.

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To the left of the desk, a cabinet contains a **pull-out surface for the printer**. Around the room, lateral-file drawers form a base beneath bookshelves and a corner window seat.

The **work area**, complete with computer, **hides behind closed cabinet doors when not in use**. To use the desk and equipment inside, the client swings open the upper and lower pairs of doors—as well as the toekick—and then pushes them out of the way into pockets. The desk top pulls out and a drawer face flips down to reveal the keyboard. The **work surface is 30 inches high**—just right for this client.

By opting for **lateral-file drawers with full-extension slides**, Edwards ensured that the client would be able to reach their entire contents easily.

Edwards chose maple for the **custom casework**, which she extended all the way from the base file drawers to the crown molding.

## the office The

client, a consultant, wanted her living room reworked so that it could also serve as a home office. Although she has full mobility, rheumatoid arthritis makes moving painful, and her ability to reach and lift may grow more limited in the future. Her plan, she told designer Gretchen Edwards, of Telford, Pa., was to work at home more; yet she and her husband also wanted to continue to use the living room for entertaining.

project:

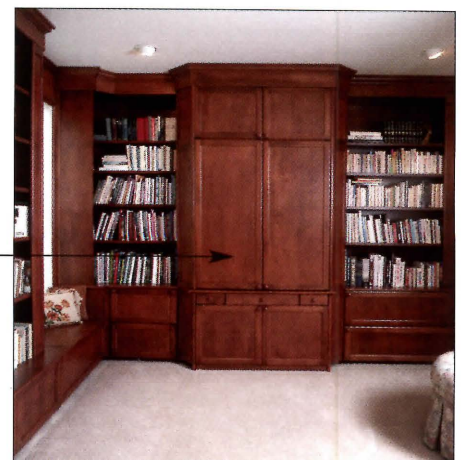
home office

designer:

Gretchen Edwards, CKD, CBD, Interior Design Services, Telford, Pa.

contractor:

Bolognese Construction, Norristown, Pa.



Photos: Blizzard Architectural Photography

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## front access

The client, a former Navy Seal, lives in this 1960s Virginia ranch house with his wife and two children. Due to a diving accident, he's paralyzed from the chest down and often uses a specially equipped vehicle to get around. Kim Allen Beasley, AIA, national architecture director at the Paralyzed Veterans Association, and Thomas D. Davies Jr., AIA, also of PVA, added a garage to the house and reworked the exterior to provide wheelchair access to the front door and to the door between the garage and the house. They accomplished this while also improving the house's overall appearance. **ra**

*Paul J. Donio is a freelance writer in New York City.*

### project:

exterior remodel

### architects:

Kim Allen Beasley, AIA, and Thomas D. Davies Jr., AIA, Paralyzed Veterans Association, Washington, D.C.

### contractor:

Homestead Development Corp., Reston, Va.

A brick-paved walk from the driveway to the house (left; also see below) slopes up a little less than the wheelchair maximum of 1:12. Then, the walk turns right (above), sloping even more gently (1:16) across the front of the house to the portico. The gradual slope makes the ramp nearly invisible.

At the entrance, there is no change of level between the portico floor and the wood floor inside, making it easy for a wheelchair to roll in. The front door is a standard residential model installed with the threshold flush. Because the portico is covered and all paving adjoining the house is pitched  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch per foot for drainage, weather isn't a problem.



Photos: Bill Lebovich/© 1998 PVA

Inside the one-and-a-half-car garage, a wood ramp (not shown) leads to a flat landing at the door to the mudroom and kitchen. To get enough rise in the ramp without exceeding 1:12 slope, the architects extended it into the aisle beside the car.

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Before the remodel, the ranch was neither accessible nor particularly attractive. The architects brightened the house's exterior—and interior—by **reducing the roof's deep overhang** by about a foot and a half. They replaced spindly posts with **wood columns** and added a **gabled portico** that protects and emphasizes the front door.



The brick path is 3 feet wide at its narrowest, and twice that at the portico, which provides plenty of maneuvering room for a wheelchair.

## resources

Researching universal design? Before wading through the piles of material on the Americans with Disabilities Act (which applies primarily to public accommodations), look to these sources for information geared specifically to residential work.

### **The Center for Universal Design School of Design, North Carolina State University**

Telephone: 919.515.3082; (for a free packet of information and a publication list, call 800.647.6777)

Web site: [www.design.ncsu.edu/cud](http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud)

E-mail: [cud@ncsu.edu](mailto:cud@ncsu.edu)

*This research and information center offers publications, referrals, and even free technical advice during short consultations by phone. For a fee, consultants will review plans and recommend solutions. On the Web site, look for "The Principles of Universal Design"—a clear, concise statement of universal design objectives.*

### **National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA)**

Telephone: 800.843.6522

Web site: [www.nkba.org](http://www.nkba.org)

*The NKBA offers its "Kitchen and Bath Planning Guidelines" for free. These essential rules of thumb now incorporate universal design throughout. For an illustrated version of the guidelines, see Mary Jo Peterson's Universal Kitchen & Bathroom Planning, below.*

### **The Accessible Housing Design File**

Barrier Free Environments Inc.

John Wiley & Sons. \$59.95.

Telephone: 800.225.5945

Web site: [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

*(Individual chapters of this volume are also available for \$7 to \$9 from North Carolina State University's Center for Universal Design; call 800.647.6777.)*

*This book contains more than 300 illustrations, most of which show design solutions along with required dimensions or clearances. Other issues covered range from grab-bar details and door swings to site design.*

### **Beautiful Universal Design: A Visual Guide**

Cynthia A. Leibrock and James Evan Terry.  
John Wiley & Sons. \$64.95.

Telephone: 800.225.5945

Web site: [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

*The emphasis is on design ideas in this guide, which features countless photographs of actual projects and products. The authors support their points with details in the text and diagrams. Subjects range from commercial work to residential furniture and accessories.*

### **Gracious Spaces**

Mary Jo Peterson and Irma Dobkin.

McGraw-Hill. \$49.95.

Telephone: 800.338.3987

Web site: [www.mcgraw-hill.com](http://www.mcgraw-hill.com)

*This brand-new book contains well-photographed case studies of recent residential universal design projects. Examples hail from around the country, and include the kitchen and bath projects shown in this article. Scheduled for release in July.*

### **Universal Kitchen & Bathroom Planning**

Mary Jo Peterson. McGraw-Hill, in conjunction with the NKBA. Available in two volumes from the NKBA—one for kitchens, one for baths. \$30 each for members, \$50 for nonmembers. Telephone: 800.843.6522

*(This title was also published in one volume last year, from McGraw-Hill for \$69.95; call 800.338.3987.)*

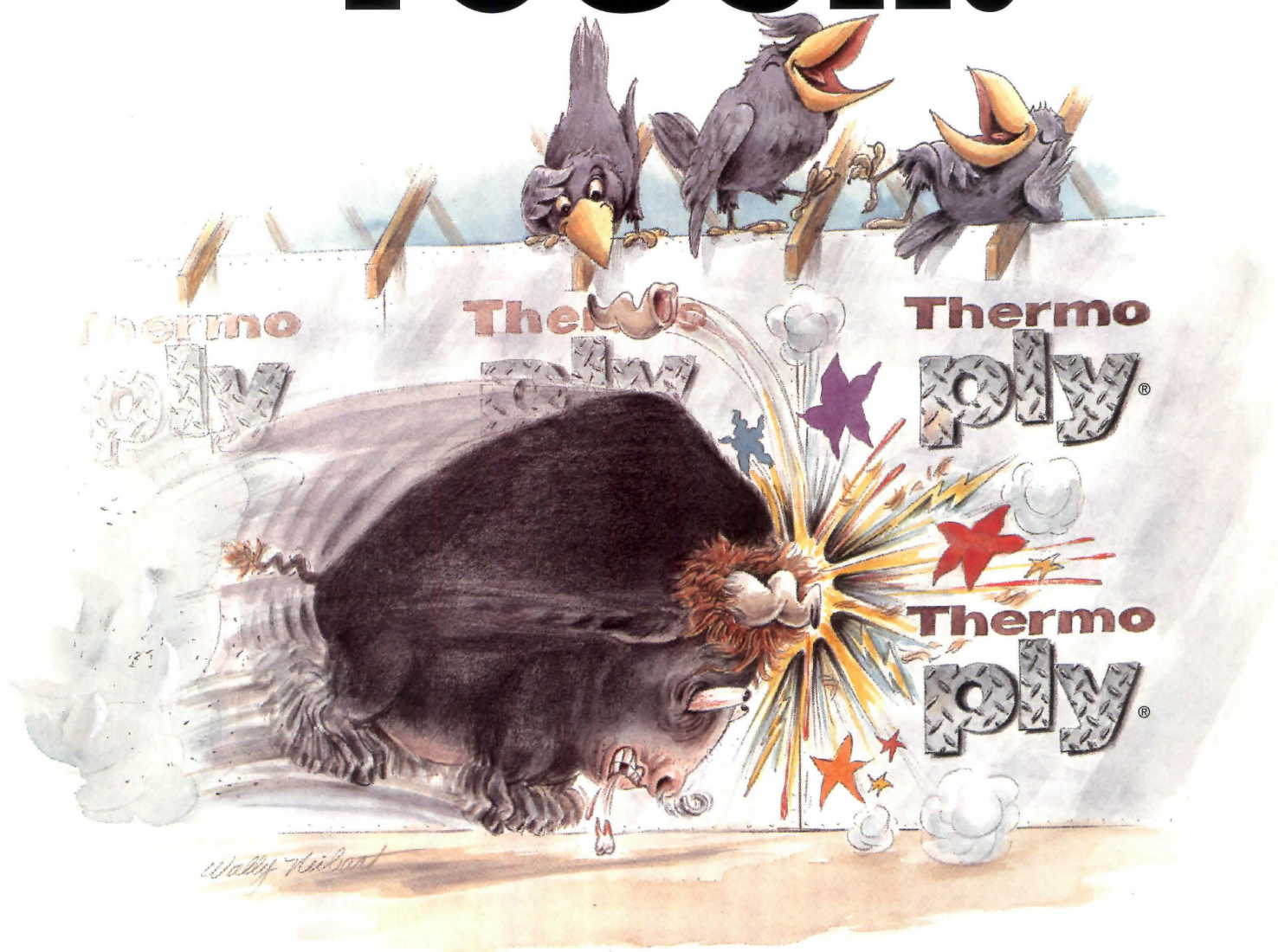
*Loaded with examples of universal design details, this book includes an illustrated version of the NKBA's "Kitchen and Bath Planning Guidelines."*

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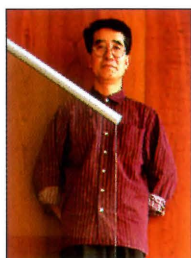
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# eight architects talk about their experiences working overseas.



*"u.s. firms  
invented ideas like  
the theme park  
and new residential  
planning models.  
foreign clients  
look here first for  
that expertise."*

—Kyo Sung Woo, FAIA



© Timothy Hursley  
Stone Cloud, a custom home in Seoul, South Korea. Architect: Kyo Sung Woo Architect, Cambridge, Mass.



# americans abroad

by rich binsacca

**g**lance at architect Damian Farrell's renderings for a small villa he's designing in Greece and you might assume he's a native of that country. He's not. In fact, Farrell lives and practices in Ann Arbor, Mich., and hails originally from South Africa.

Farrell first learned of the Greek project during a casual lunch conversation in a local restaurant owned by his future clients. "They were very nervous about hiring a Greek firm to design their summer home," he says. "They weren't sure they'd get what they wanted."

In Greece, Farrell explains, most new homes are drawn up by engineers, not architects. The Greek government requires the stamp of a registered civil engineer before it will even consider issuing a building permit; as a result, architects are often left out of the residential design loop. And Greek engineers, Farrell says, tend to be limited in their creativity and gumption.

"They know a few things very well," such as local building methods, he says. "But there's a lack of sophistication in the variety of their work."

While Farrell's design for the spectacular hilltop location is distinctly Greek, with a village-like plan and traditional materials and forms, the design process was all-American. He spent 10 days in the small Greek village surrounding the site, walking the streets and sketching ideas, trying to capture the area's architectural heritage. He then presented his ideas to his clients and a team of Greek engineers hired to convert and submit the final plans for approval.

"At first, it felt like a stone wall," he says of the engineers' initial reactions to him, a U.S. architect with a South African accent. "But then I started sketching my ideas on an overhead projector and we hit it off."

## programming pains

In many countries, the normal diligence put forth by a U.S. architect is an anomaly. "We

detail much better," says Dhiru Thadani, AIA, of Thadani Hetzel Partnership, in Washington, D.C. Thadani has done several projects in his native India. "We'll produce what is for us a light set of plans, but it's still five times more than what a developer or builder in India is used to."

Architect Don Jacobs, AIA, of JBZ Architecture + Planning, in Newport Beach, Calif., found the same situation to be true in the Philippines. "They have a 'we'll work it out in the field' kind of attitude," he says, recalling the trials of getting a complete site plan before starting the design process. "It makes it very difficult for us."

While proper programming in the States commonly concerns a building's use, performance, and durability, extracting even the broadest such concepts from foreign clients (especially developers and bureaucrats, who control many of the middle-market housing projects abroad) is often laborious. "You not only need to listen more, but also to ask more



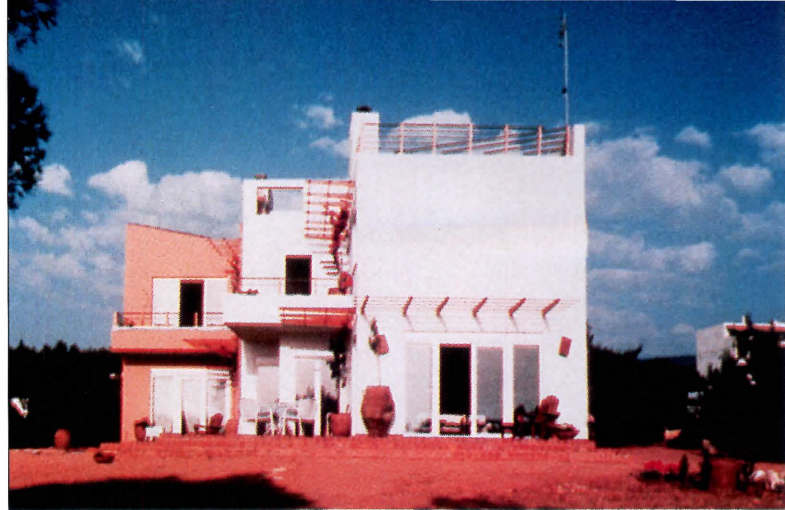
*"greek engineers know a few things very well, but there's a lack of sophistication in the variety of their work."*

—Damian Farrell, AIA



egypt  
greece  
japan  
south korea  
india  
turkey  
philippines

# americans abroad



Courtesy MS&R

A custom home in Rafina, Greece. Architect: Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle, Minneapolis.

*"i made it clear to my clients up front that we weren't going to take the project any further than design development."*—Garth Rockcastle, FAIA



© Thadani Hetzel Partnership

Thane Township, a community north of Mumbai, India. Architect: Thadani Hetzel Partnership, Washington, D.C.

(Below: Thadani, right; partner Peter Hetzel, left)



© Zweig Photography

*"we'll produce what is for us a light set of plans, but it's still five times more than what a developer or builder in india is used to."*

—Dhiru A. Thadani, AIA

questions," says Jacobs.

For a development of several hillside homes in South Korea, where JBZ also has worked, it took several conversations for Jacobs to realize that his clients preferred to park their cars on the steeply sloped streets, thus eliminating garages and driveways. They also wanted their homes to sit flat on graded lots instead of stepping down the hill, which required extensive grading and retaining-wall provisions. "That's a little different from what we do in Southern California," Jacobs says.

In India, Thadani and his business partner, Peter Hetzel, struggled to decipher the program for market-rate apartments in the neotraditional community the firm was hired to design. They found that the premium cost of electricity in India precluded the use of interior corridors, which require extra lighting. "You have to find the reason behind a particular suggestion before you can critique it or offer solutions," Thadani observes.

With some foreign clients, American-style due diligence and presentation methods may incur puzzlement and even resistance. "Some clients are

used to just getting the final scheme from the architect, not a selection of alternatives for their consideration," Thadani says. Such clients don't see the value of extensive design services and hence may balk at paying full price for them. For the neotraditional project, Thadani recalls, "We ended up taking less in fees, but it was still substantially higher than what the client usually pays for design."

## a cultural marriage

One of the biggest challenges for American architects operating overseas is adapting popular American-style designs to local needs and traditions.

Roger Williams, FAIA, of Seattle's Mithun Partners, was hired for a custom-home project in earthquake-damaged Kōbe, Japan, in part because he could design the house using 2x6 frame construction in accordance with U.S. seismic standards. "We can design something for about \$80 a foot that would normally cost clients in Japan \$225," he says.

The Kōbe house was a traditional Japanese design for three generations of single women—a distinct aesthetic break from

Mithun's more mainstream single-family housing projects in Japan. Most Japanese developers, says Williams, seek to replicate an ideal of Western independence and creativity. "People in Japan covet many things American," says Williams. "They visit here and northern Europe and see housing that is more technologically efficient, of better structural quality, and more attainable and affordable."

Because of a shortage of buildable land and a cultural aversion to wasted space, however, community design is much denser in Japan than in the States. In Japan, Williams says, "the community plan is less important than the individual house plan." Yet when Mithun suggested townhomes, clients recoiled. "If they have to share a wall, they'd just as soon live in a high-rise condo downtown," Williams says.

Houston-based EDI Architecture, which has an office in Angola, went into Africa fully prepared to deal with cultural challenges and adjustments. "You get off the plane with your hat in your hand, ready to merge the two cultures," says EDI partner





Courtesy JBZ Architecture + Planning  
Dream City, a development of hillside homes in Paju, South Korea. Architect: JBZ Architecture + Planning, Newport Beach, Calif.



*"it's exciting to  
take people over  
there from our  
office and discover  
the nuances of a  
new culture."*

—Donald Jacobs, AIA

Dennis Thompson.

Compromise is key. For the homes in Bairro Sonangol, a new community on the Angolan coast, EDI swapped the open kitchen plans popular in the West for rooms closed off from public spaces, which confine cooking odors and allow chefs to work out of sight. And while the firm managed to convince clients to accept built-in closets (as opposed to culturally preferred armchairs), it could not eliminate an enclosed front room or move electrical meters from their traditional spot near the front door. "Our clients wanted to see both Western and Angolan influences, so the design process was a series of compromises between the two cultures," says Thompson. "That's what makes it fun and challenging."

A client's exposure to more global influences often calls for a melding of traditional and contemporary cultural approaches. Kyo Sung Woo, FAIA, is a Korean national who has been practicing in Cambridge, Mass., since 1967, though he has spent much of the past 12 years working on various projects in South Korea. Woo designed Stone Cloud, a custom house overlook-

ing the East China Sea, for an international business executive. Per Korean custom, the design centers on a courtyard, but it also takes advantage of views of the sea, which "expresses his more extroverted way of looking at the world," says Woo.

For a house on the Greek Isles overlooking the Aegean Sea, Garth Rockcastle, FAIA, of Minneapolis-based Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle, combined the whitewashed stucco walls and boxy massing of southern Greece with the earth tones and tile roofs found farther north. Given the owners' Greek heritage and worldly perspective, says Rockcastle, "We were able to explore some contemporary ideas," such as dividing the 2,000-square-foot home into two distinct sections, private and public, with views and ample access from each to the extensive garden and terraces overlooking the water.

## community planning

Of the residential design talents in demand abroad, community planning skills are perhaps the most sought after by foreign clients, and the United States appears to own the market. Woo

credits U.S. firms with creating a global brand for architecture. "We invented ideas like the theme park and new residential planning models," he says. "Foreign clients look here first for that expertise."

That was true for Thadani Hetzel, which had a hand in designing Seaside and Kentlands and was hired to interpret the same concepts in India. "It actually works well there, because the plan has to be pedestrian-friendly," Thadani says. "Very few people have cars and there's not a lot of developed infrastructure." The 80-acre site for Thane Township is nearly identical to Seaside in size and features, but it has 4,500 residential units, about 10 times that of its Florida counterpart.

San Francisco-based Sandy & Babcock International too has found an overseas market for its community planning expertise. The firm was hired to plan Ras Sudr, near Cairo, one of 10 new resort communities along the coast of the Sinai peninsula. The master plan and housing styles were inspired by similar projects in Florida and California. "The clients became aware of us after seeing our work in those markets," says John Eller, AIA,

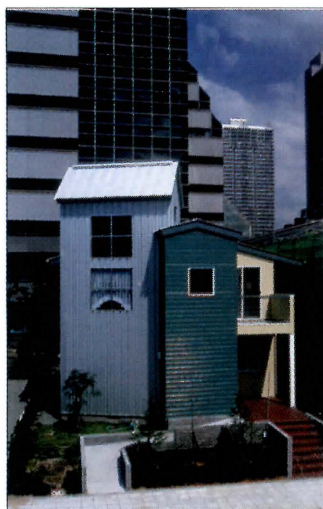




Courtesy EDI

Bairro Sonangol, a neotraditional village in Luanda Sul, Angola. Architect: EDI Architecture, Houston.

*"you get off the plane with your hat in your hand, ready to merge the two cultures."*—Dennis Thompson



Courtesy Mithun Partners

A model home in Kobe, Japan. Architect: Mithun Partners, Seattle.



*"people in japan covet many things american."*

—Roger Williams, FAIA

the firm's president.

Though the clients were anxious to translate a U.S. resort aesthetic, Eller's design crew had to address a few local quirks for the project's 1,300 housing units. Living rooms, for example, are designed to accommodate two large groups, creating a dual-parlor configuration. And plumbing systems will be placed in the exterior walls for easy access should they fail. "It seems they have very little confidence in their plumbing contractors," says Eller.

### local assistance

Merging American-style design ideas with local traditions, building materials, codes, and practices is a challenge most American architects working abroad tackle with the help of a locally based firm. "I made it clear to my clients up front that we weren't going to take the project any further than design development," recalls Rockcastle. "I don't speak or read Greek, or know anything about the local customs."

Rockcastle's clients contracted with a Greek engineer, who converted the firm's schematics to working drawings for approvals.

Rockcastle critiqued the engineer's work to ensure that the design intent remained intact.

Even firms with a bigger overseas stake often prefer to stay at home rather than open overseas offices, instead relying on partnerships with local firms. "In Japan, clients recognize the value of creating partnerships to deliver the project," says Don Sandy, FAIA, of Sandy & Babcock. "Besides, when I visit clients, I present the project and sketch ideas and changes right in front of them. They can see that we don't need to open an office there to make that happen."

Sandy & Babcock usually partners with a local firm of the client's choosing. The company has devised an organizational structure that helps define roles and responsibilities and avoid miscommunication. "Typically, we do the schematics and planning, and the local firm handles the entitlements, land issues, and local approvals process," says Eller. The system is so effective that the firm's overseas clients now make it part of their RFP packages and contracts when they look for and hire local talent.

In some markets and for

some projects, however, the scope of design services goes beyond schematics, or there simply is no local talent pool to tap for on-site services. Either situation may prompt the opening of an overseas office by an imported architect.

For Thane Township, Thadani Hetzel opened an office in Bombay with local CAD operators, putting that team on the same software and e-mail systems as the firm's staff in Washington. "When we're asleep, they're working," says Thadani, referring to the 10-hour time difference. "We sketch changes over their CAD drawings to help them interpret what we want, then check their changes in later sets."

Lack of local expertise prompted EDI's decision to open its Angola office. At first, the firm staffed the office with personnel from Houston; four years later, the eight-person office is still run by an EDI associate but has a staff of architects and engineers culled locally and regionally.

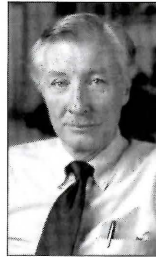
EDI's overseas success, like Thadani Hetzel's, is closely linked to its electronic capabilities. Dennis Thompson





Illustration and photo, left: Courtesy Sandy & Babcock; photo, right: © Tod Gifford

Ras Sudr, a resort community near Cairo. Architect: Sandy & Babcock, San Francisco. (Photos: Sandy, left; John Eller, AIA, company president, right)



*"clients recognize the value of creating partnerships to deliver the project."*

—Donald Sandy, FAIA

exchanges up to 60 e-mail messages a day with the Angola office. "The key is setting yourself up so everyone relies on e-mail instead of the phone," he says. "We couldn't do overseas work without it."

### the bottom line

Despite various successes, overseas opportunities for U.S. residential architects are limited, particularly compared with the amount of nonresidential work available. Not surprisingly, large firms predominate. According to a 1997 AIA survey, 90 percent of the association's member firms with 50 or more registered architects had overseas experience, while only 6 percent of small firms did.

Russell Keune, FAIA, director of the AIA International Committee, says those numbers reflect the fact that large companies are better equipped to handle the financial and legal risks involved in working abroad. "The biggest hurdle is establishing solid contracts and getting paid," he says. Smaller firms are less able to take a financial hit from an overseas investment, whether it's a single house job or a community master plan.

The risk factor increases when you consider the extent to which political changes influence foreign markets. In some countries, national banks must guarantee loans or financing before the government allows construction. Such issues can delay or derail a project. Recent political upheaval in Turkey and the Philippines, for instance, has Sandy & Babcock and JBZ waiting to proceed on work in those areas.

To lessen their risk, residential firms with global experience insist on certain provisions. "I learned early on to get a retainer before you start, watch late payments, and be bold enough to stop working if the money stops," says Sandy. In addition, his firm requires payment in U.S. dollars, never the local currency du jour.

Still, these architects relish the opportunities overseas, risks and all. "It's exciting to take people over there from our office and discover the nuances of a new culture," says JBZ's Jacobs. "To do it right, you can't just read books or hear someone else's story. You have to go." **ra**

*Rich Binsacca is a freelance writer in Boise, Idaho.*

## international resources

The AIA offers several publications about practicing abroad, including the following:

### International Practice Checklists

(for various foreign markets)

*These checklists, produced by AIA's International Committee, cover the basics of practicing architecture overseas, from business and professional requirements to information on currency and weather.*

800.242.3837

[www.e-architect.com/pia/intlmkts](http://www.e-architect.com/pia/intlmkts)

### Europe: Architectural Markets and Practice

*This book provides an overview of current architectural marketing- and practice-related case studies throughout western Europe. \$28 for AIA members, \$40 for nonmembers.*

888.272.4115

### Southeast Asia: Architectural Markets and Practice

*Case studies by AIA members in China, Indonesia, and Malaysia are featured in this book. It examines several other markets as well, and includes information on various residential and nonresidential projects.*

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### The Directory of International and National Architectural Professional Organizations and Associations

*This publication provides information about international, national, and regional associations in 124 countries.*

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[www.e-architect.com/pia/membero/intl/checklst.asp](http://www.e-architect.com/pia/membero/intl/checklst.asp)



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off the shelf

# barrier-free

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Broan/NuTone, of Hartford, Wis., offers wireless chimes that work by activating a 10-second flashing strobe light. The chime receivers can be plugged into any 120-volt wall outlet; the chime buttons work on a supplied battery. For additional

information, contact

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1.800.558.1711.

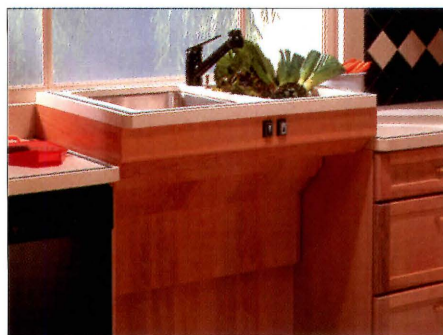


## shower power

Who says all barrier-free bath products look institutional? Check out this shower from Adamsville, Tenn.-based Aqua Glass Corp. It's part of the company's barrier-free Special Care collection. A 3-inch threshold, wraparound grab bar, textured floor, and fold-up seat make



showering safe and comfortable for anyone, whether seated or standing. Optional Delta control valves and Alsons handheld shower fixtures protect users from extreme changes in water pressure and temperature. Best of all, though, the shower is as pleasant to look at as it is to use. For more information, contact Aqua Glass at 901.632.2501.



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With motorized, height-adjustable cabinet and counter systems from Accessible Designs/Adjustable Systems, everybody can take part in meal preparation and kitchen cleanup, regardless of height, size, or abilities. Sinks and cabinets slide up and down at the touch of a button, accommodating seated or standing users. According to the Athens, Ohio-based manufacturer, the products install and retrofit easily. For additional information, contact Accessible Designs/Adjustable Systems at 740.593.5240.—*deena shehata*





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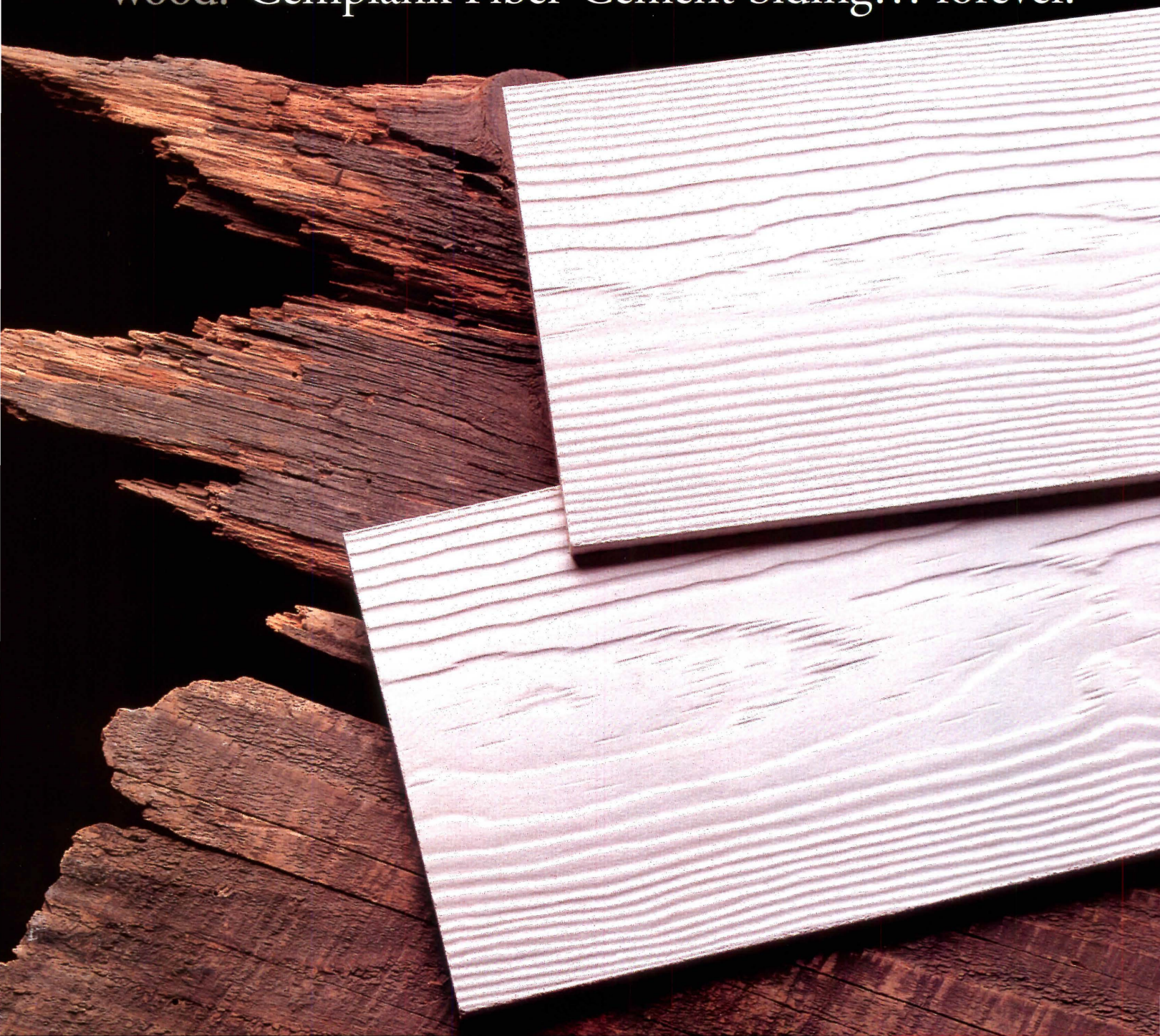
If you are looking for some authentic New England charm on your next project, call us at 888.880.6324 for distributor information and be sure to visit our website. [www.homefittings.com](http://www.homefittings.com)



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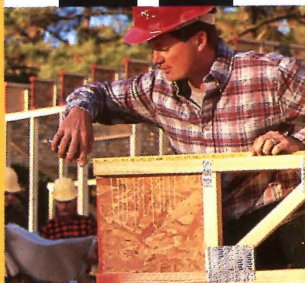
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# search party

doing research on the internet?  
these tools can help you focus your quest.

by john butterfield

**t**hink of the Internet as the world's largest reference library—but one in which all the books have been piled in the middle of the rotunda floor, with no card catalog in sight. The array of information is stunningly rich—and frighteningly disorganized. It could take an entire search party years of flipping pages to find a particular bit of data.

Fortunately, there are research tools right there on the Web that can help—as long as you choose the proper tool for the task. Otherwise, it's like driving a nail with a lug wrench: do-able, but less than elegant, and tough on nail, wrench, and knuckles.

Basically, you have three organizational options to choose from: portals, directories, and search engines. Portals are the front doors that the big boys are building to attract you when you first launch your browser. They're loaded with bells and whistles to enhance their "stickiness"—industry lingo for a site's ability to keep readers around long enough to catch a flurry of banner ads as they click from page to page.

You've got better things

to do. Skip merrily past the opening screens of portal sites if you want to do serious research, and move on to the workhorse levels of directories or free-form searches. Many sites—portals included—offer both.

## direct deposits

Think of a directory as an Internet help desk peopled by unseen reference librarians. You will see the results of their cataloging in the topic lists they have assembled. A directory site saves you the trouble of refining, defining, and narrowing a pure Internet search (more on that later).

**The upside:** Functioning humans, categorizing away, are behind the best of these sites. While there's no guarantee that the information on a listed site is particularly reliable (always a problem on the Web), you at least can be relatively confident that it'll be on topic.

**The downside:** Set topic lists are only as good—and as current—as the most recent compilation. Many directory sites run computerized searches to keep their lists more current, but that tends to dilute the human touch that makes the prevetted site selection valuable in the first place.



Photo illustration: Peter Means

**The trick:** If you find a directory with a particularly useful set of Web sites listed, place a bookmark (in Netscape Navigator) or favorite (in Internet Explorer) that leads directly to that site. When you next go to the topic list via the marker, refresh or reload the view in your browser, which should automatically display any updates, deletions, or additions to the list.

## search me

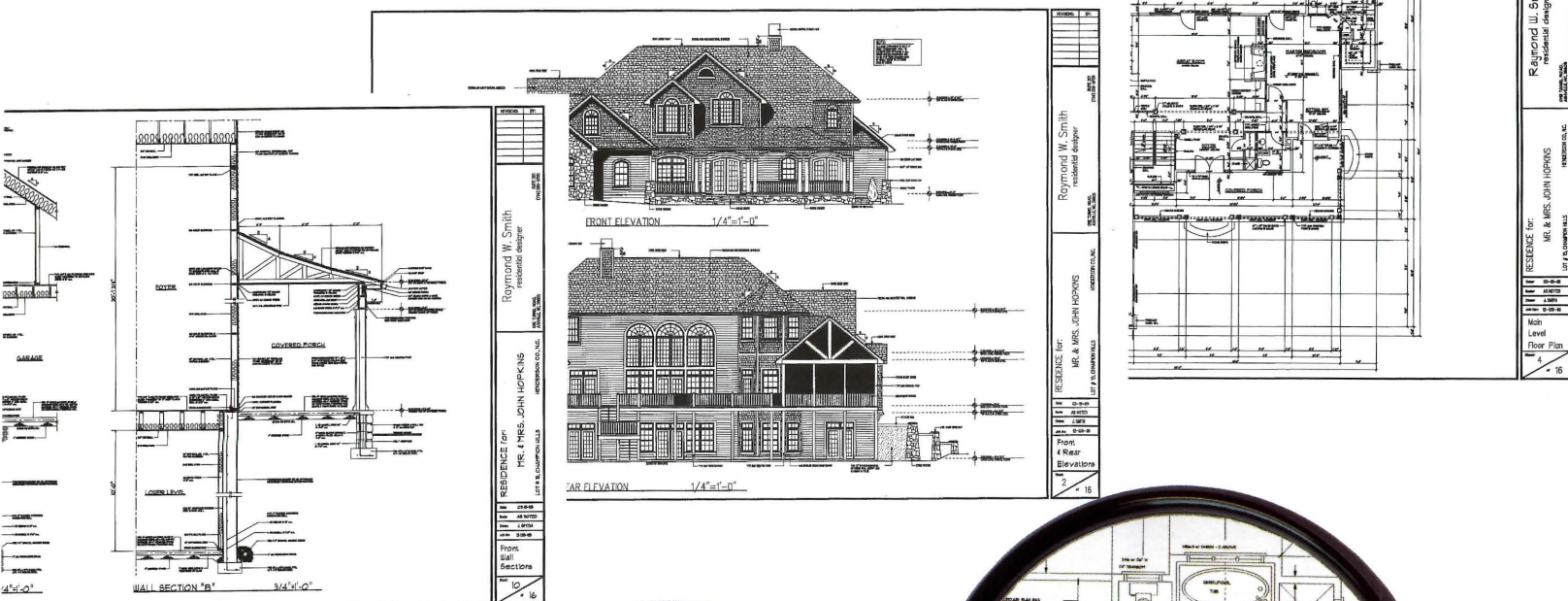
So you don't trust the hidden humans behind the preset site lists on a directory? Do you trust your own knowledge of the field—enough to cull the diamonds from the coal? Feeling lucky? Feeling masochistic?

Then you're ready for heavy-duty customized Web searches.

In simple terms, search  
*continued on page 90*



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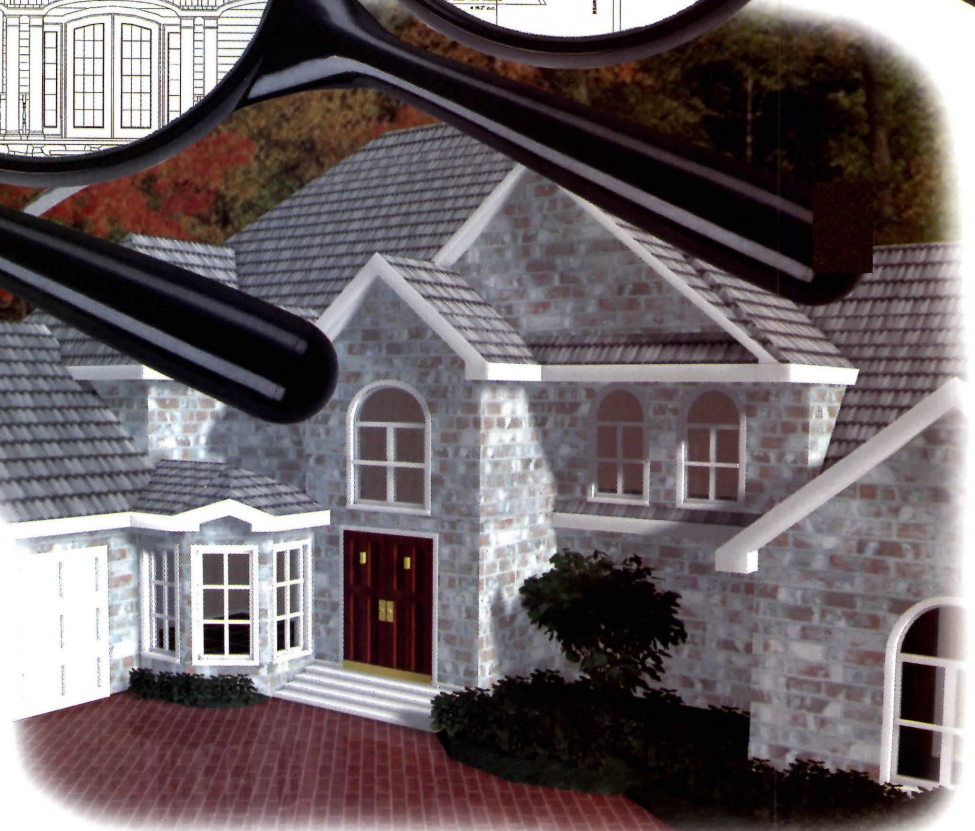
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engines take a typed-in word or series of words as entered by the user, then troll across the Net to find sites—or individual pages on sites—that either contain that combination of words in their text, or have “metatags”—words hidden in the background coding, but readable by the search engines—that contain the search words or phrases. Search engines are the tool to use if you have a tightly drawn, well-defined question or topic to research.

**The upside:** You can use your own expertise to narrow your search criteria and go directly to sites that contain the information you seek, without having to wait for those hidden, faceless librarians to catalog and artificially limit your potential information sources to the ones they’ve found.

**The downside:** Given the growth of the Internet and the wealth of information stashed in every nook and cyber-cranny, you must carefully focus your query to turn up useful information. Cast too wide a net into the Net and you’ll be stuck with a catch so huge that you’re buried in information. For example, a search for the word “architecture” on the popular AltaVista search engine ([www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com)) turned up 3,762,460 Web pages on the topic—impressive, but a tad too broad to sift through on deadline.

**The trick:** As with any

tool, the better you learn to handle a search engine, the more effectively you’ll wield it. Many search engines depend on Boolean logic, drawn from algebraic formulas codified by the English mathematician George Boole. Using plus signs, quotation marks, and connective words such as “and,” “or,” or “not,” the diligent searcher can construct a search phrase that cinches a tight noose around just the appropriate information.

Luckily, search engines are getting “smarter” all the time. Many accept search questions in plain old English phrases. Try a variety of search engines to see which one has the best feel to it; your comfort level and results are liable to vary significantly from those of others using the selfsame sites.

Once you find an engine that feels right, focus in on it. Learn its inner workings—the shortcuts, combinations of keywords, connectors, and phrases that rev up your chosen engine.

The payoff? Those books piled in the middle of the Internet library will return magically to their shelves. And you’ll find the information you seek. *ra*

*John Butterfield, the new media editor for Hanley-Wood, Inc., runs the company’s assorted Web sites. Find links to them all at [www.hbrnet.com](http://www.hbrnet.com).*

## search engines and directories for residential architects

### search engines

Here are some of the leading search engines available today. Most of these sites are combination plates of portal, directory, and search engine all rolled into one. See if one of them suits you:

**Yahoo:** [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)

**HotBot:** [www.hotbot.com](http://www.hotbot.com)

**Excite:** [www.excite.com](http://www.excite.com)

**Internet Sleuth:** [www.isleuth.com/](http://www.isleuth.com/). Will search using a variety of search engines simultaneously.

**AltaVista:** [www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com). My favorite for breadth and depth.

**Snap:** [www.snap.com/](http://www.snap.com/)

**Lycos:** [www.lycos.com/](http://www.lycos.com/)

**Switchboard:** [www.switchboard.com/](http://www.switchboard.com/)

**Go2Net:** [www.go2net.com/search.html](http://www.go2net.com/search.html)

### specialized directories

These sites either focus on directories for residential architects or offer a specialized wrinkle. Not a comprehensive list, but good places to start. Check out:

**residential architect Online:**

[www.residentialarchitect.com](http://www.residentialarchitect.com). The site for this magazine, with archived articles, links to outstanding architect sites, and online bulletin boards.

**The American Institute of Architects:**

[www.aiaonline.com/](http://www.aiaonline.com/). Professional listings, references, product information, and news from the association.

**Plan Net:** [www.planet.com](http://www.planet.com). Interesting design, with features and news on the profession.

**InfoSpace:** [www.infospaceinc.com/](http://www.infospaceinc.com/). Useful for tracking down phone numbers, e-mail and postal addresses, and the like.

**Fedstats:** [www.fedstats.gov/](http://www.fedstats.gov/). One-stop shopping for all kinds of federal statistics.

**Hoover’s Online:** [www.hoovers.com/](http://www.hoovers.com/). Hard-core research and information on companies.

**Ask Jeeves:** [www.ask.com/](http://www.ask.com/). Remarkably intuitive responses to real-language questions.

**About.com:** [miningco.com/](http://miningco.com/). A wide variety of directories assembled by experts somewhat less faceless than is the norm in directories.—*j.b.*





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# the right mix

a bevy of advantages makes composite decking an attractive alternative to wood.

by rich binsacca

It never splinters, it never needs sealing, it's maintenance free, and it has the half-life of plutonium. If you believe the sales pitch for composite decking, you'll never specify wood decking again. Delve a little deeper into these engineered products, however, and you'll find both strengths and weaknesses. But for many applications, composites represent a worthy alternative to solid sawn decking.

## plastic fantastic

Most composite decking consists of reclaimed and lesser-grade wood fibers mixed with plastic resins, some of which originate as recycled post-consumer waste from milk jugs and grocery bags. A few products are made entirely of plastic, while others are fiberglass-reinforced plastic.

Whatever the content of their products, manufacturers claim that composite decking is far superior in most every way to the conventional staples of deck building—redwood, cedar, pressure-treated pine, and fir—which suffer abuse from foot traffic, standing water, UV rays, and exposure to ground moisture and insects, eroding their performance and durability.



Courtesy Trex Co.

Most wood-based composite decking, like Trex Co.'s (above), weathers to a soft gray without extra treatment or preservatives. Composites' higher density and uniformity often permit greater design flexibility than wood allows.

Composite products shrug off these assaults chiefly because the wood fibers they contain are shortened, reconstituted, and bonded with high-strength resins. The result is a more uniform and stable material that retains much of wood's workability. Planks are produced in standard deck dimensions (nominal 2-bys) and are sold through retail lumberyards, just like their all-wood counterparts.

But composites cannot completely substitute for wood. Intended only for nonstructural applications, they are unsuitable for deck

framing, stair stringers, and railing posts.

## well fastened

Composites also differ from conventional wood in their installation. Because of their resistance to splitting, composite planks generally require no predrilling for screws and nails, and some can be fastened using nail guns.

Even though composites resist the shrink/swell cycle that pops nails in wood decking, some systems avoid the problem altogether by using hidden fasteners. Pultronex Corp.'s E-Z Deck planks, for

example, snap into retaining clips screwed to the top edge of conventional wood joists. TimberTech, by Crane Plastics Co., consists of extruded tongue-and-groove planks designed for hidden fastening within the joint connection. Because of their open plank profile, however, these systems require exposed plank ends to be finished with a solid board or end cap.

Some products that don't employ hidden fasteners nonetheless can be manipulated to conceal nails and screws. After specifying Trex Co.'s decking on some

*continued on page 96*

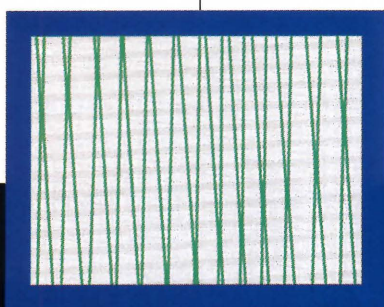


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commercial projects, Melrose, Mass., architect Mark Forth used the solid-plank composite on his own house. He hid the screws by countersinking them into the face of the planks and pounding the material with a hammer. The composite closed over the holes and eventually left a smooth surface.

Forth chose Trex decking for its durability and low maintenance—its manufacturer says the product never needs staining or sealing—but he discovered other benefits as well during construction. Because the material can be cut like lumber, Forth used it to wrap his railing posts, which allowed them to be anchored into the ground instead of on top of the deck. He found the product even more workable than wood when he used it for a

curved deck. “Every piece had to be cut individually to fit, and we were able to detail and rout it more easily [than wood],” Forth says.

Such advantages come at a price. Crane Plastics estimates that the installed cost of a 12-by-20-foot TimberTech deck is comparable to redwood and about \$1,000 less than clear western red cedar. But the price premium for composites over standard pressure-treated decking is balanced by the savings on finish and maintenance.

### finishing touches

Like most who use composite decking, Forth allowed the material to age and change color naturally, in his case to a soft gray that nearly matches the color of the bluestone veneer he applied to the steps leading up to his Trex-decked porch. While manufacturers of composite decking promote this natural aging as the preferred finish, the products do accept oil-based paints and stains after a month or two in place. Once applied, however, such finishes need to be maintained and periodically reapplied. Crane also warns that stain or paint can clog the pre-drilled drain holes in its TimberTech T&G planks.

Another red-flag issue is allowable spans, which may have to be narrower on center than for milled

lumber of comparable dimensions. While wood decking that exceeds its allowable span becomes springy, composites are more likely to sag. To compensate, Forth reduced his joist spacing to 12 inches on center. Manufacturers also recommend narrower on-center spacing (less than 16 inches) for diagonal layouts, where connection points are farther apart along each plank. As with wood, installers of composites also must typically leave a narrow gap at butt joints and other connections, to help shed water.

Despite its more uniform construction, composite decking is susceptible to warping if exposed to rain or standing water before installation. Forth allowed some wavy pieces to dry out in the sun, which loosened the fibers enough that the planks flattened out after he nailed them in place.

Because the composite decking industry is in its infancy, most products are still awaiting code listings (though many meet or exceed the applicable standards). Typically, these materials are fire-rated as either Class B or Class C, which is similar to the ratings for solid wood. Some, like Trex and TimberTech, also meet Americans with Disabilities Act specs for slip resistance. **ra**

*Rich Binsacca is a freelance writer in Boise, Idaho.*

## resources

### AERT

(makers of ChoiceDek)  
800.951.5117  
www.choicedek.com

**Crane Plastics Co.**  
(makers of TimberTech)  
800.307.7780  
www.timbertech.com

**Kroy Building Products**  
800.933.5769  
www.kroybp.com

**L. B. Plastics**  
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**MacLumber Inc.**  
803.245.1700  
www.maclumber.com

**Pultrone Corp.**  
(makers of E-Z Deck)  
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Unlike solid wood decking, composite planks can be made with features such as underside grooves that reduce weight and facilitate drainage and air circulation.

### what's your spec?

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Location courtesy of Hallmark Homes, Scott Kochin, builder, Atlanta, GA.

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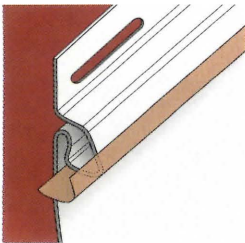
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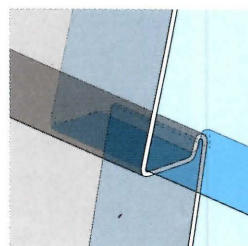
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# curve appeal

rounded details stamp this dormer as the centerpiece of a Pittsburgh home's façade.

by rick vitullo, aia

**S**ometimes, such as with waterfront properties, a home's front elevation can play second fiddle to its rear. In designing the renovation for a house in Pennsylvania, architects Charles DeLisio, AIA, and Deborah Elliott confronted this very situation—albeit inland, in the Mount Washington section of Pittsburgh.

Like many of its neighbors, the house offered the best views from the back, toward downtown Pittsburgh. But the owner and the architects, of locally based STUDIO DeLisio Architecture & Design, wanted to take advantage of a less popular but still spectacular vista from the front of the home as well. The renovation included remodeling the attic/guest room space to include a balconied dormer that would overlook the surrounding scenic neighborhoods and hills.

The flow of the site dictated an asymmetrical layout, which the architects emphasized during the preliminary phase of design. They inserted a subtly angled garage into the home's lower level and flanked it with a curved stone wall. A rounded porch entablature above further defines the look. As the design evolved, the dormer literally became the home's crowning statement, amplifying the façade's curved, asymmetrical motif.

*continued on page 102*

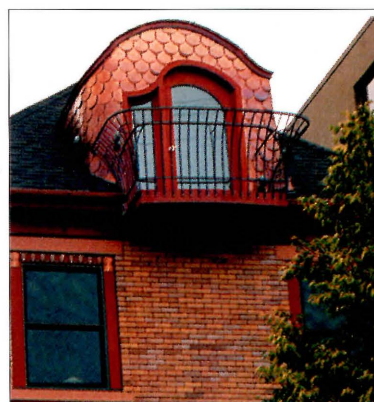
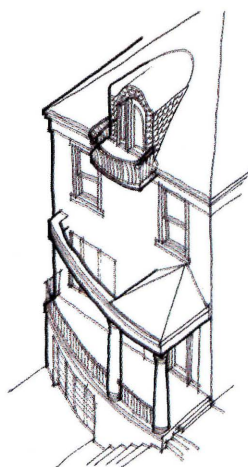
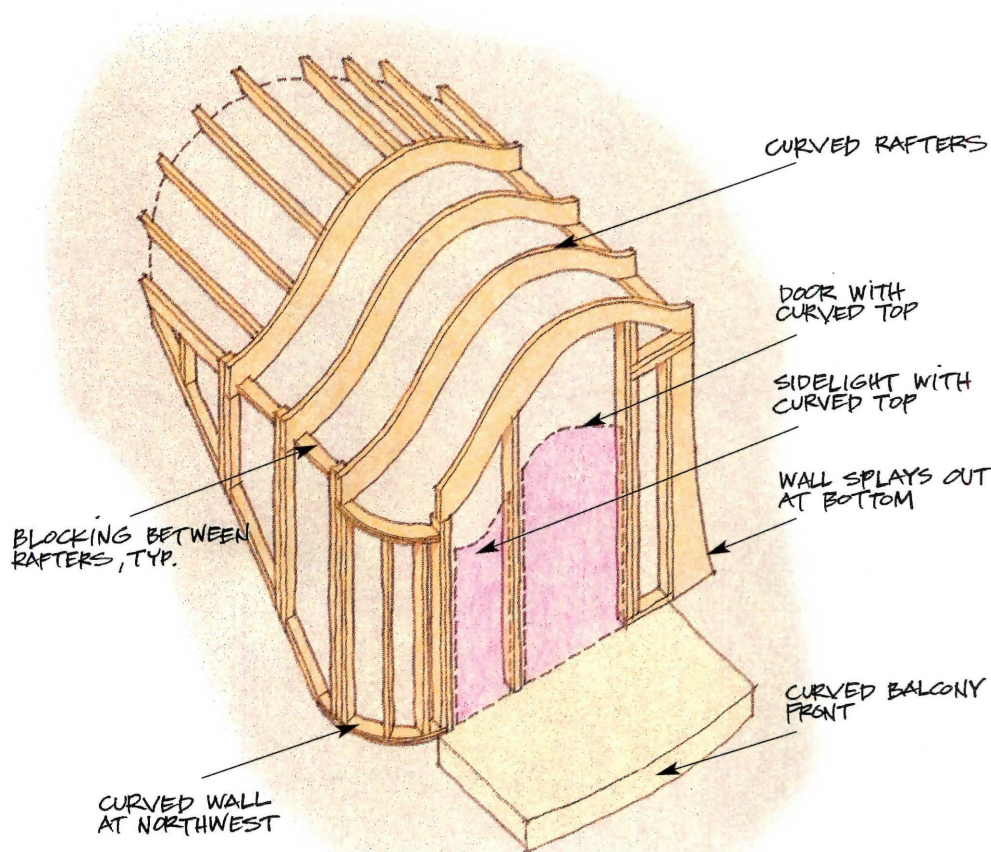


Photo: STUDIO DeLisio Architecture & Design  
Illustrations: Rick Vitullo

The multiple and compound curves of the dormer (left) echo the curved elements in the rest of the renovation, including the porch entablature and the garage outer wall (far left). A cabinetmaker fabricated the dormer's rafters (above) in his shop using standard 2x12s, laid out and cut to the final shape. (The final length was cut in the field to fit.) The craftsman also made the dormer's redwood door casings.



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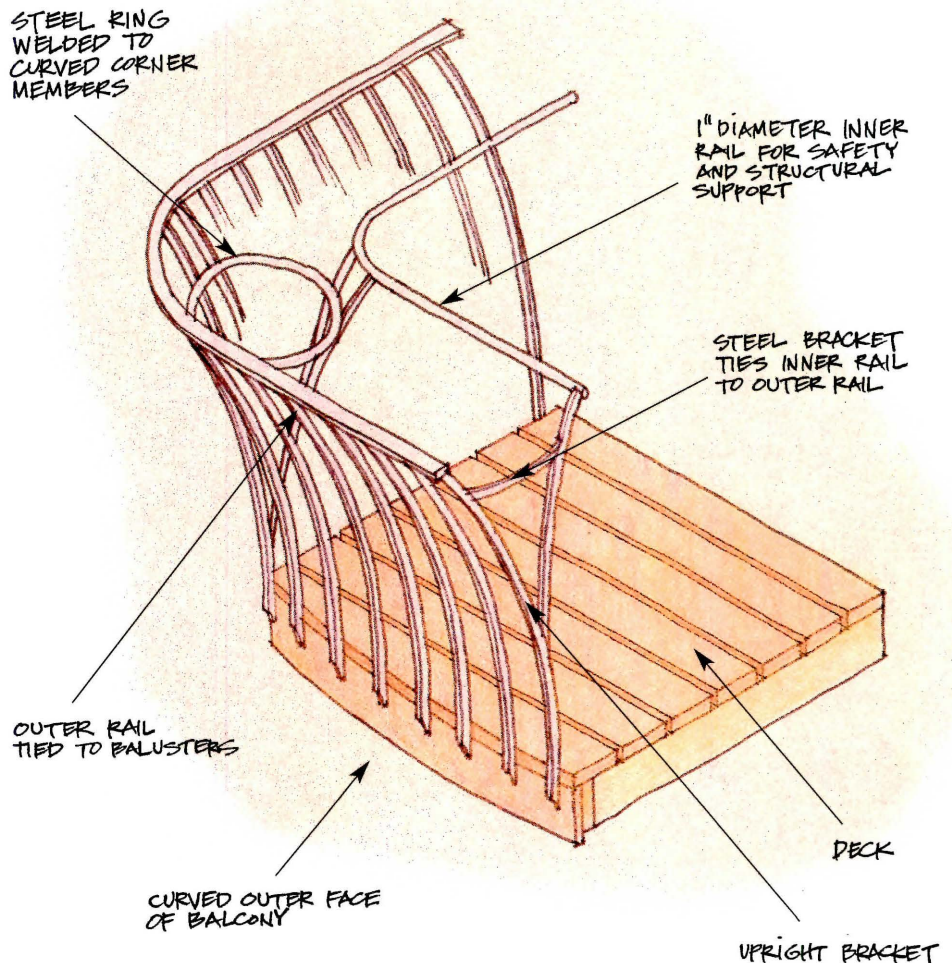
Not surprisingly, the challenging design demanded a true craftsman's touch.

DeLisio hired a cabinetmaker to fabricate the dormer's curved elements, including rafters, door frames, and casings, most of which were later cut in the field to fit. The ironwork in the balcony railing, made by Jeff Forster, Forster Iron Art, Wheeling, W.Va., is also curved, with balusters bowing out from bottom to top. Steel rings and brackets add structural stability while helping to maximize the curve motif.

Even the northwest corner of the dormer is rounded, and sheathed with curved, 1/4-inch plywood layers.

DeLisio and Elliott spec'd all the dormer walls to be finished with standard copper-clad fiberglass shingles, appropriately scalloped, in keeping with the elevation's curved theme. Inside, plaster over metal lath covers the structure's walls and ceiling. The roof of the dormer, nearly invisible from the street, received a combination of membrane (at the flatter, top part) and fiberglass shingles, to match the house's roof. The architects enhanced the jewel-like effect of this complex design by finishing the redwood trim of the door and sidelight with semitransparent red stain. **ra**

*Rick Vitullo, AIA, is founder and principal of Oak Leaf Studio Architects, Crownsville, Md.*



The dormer's railing includes no straight members. Plans show the curves in both the railing and the balcony, but one would have to view the design three-dimensionally to detect all of its curved pieces.

Illustration: Rick Vitullo

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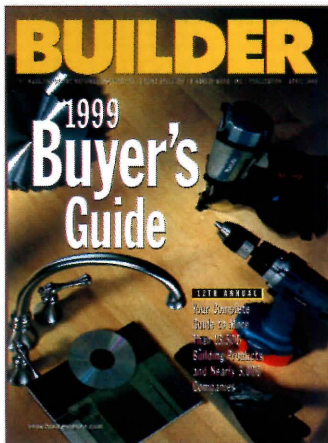
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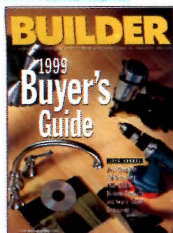
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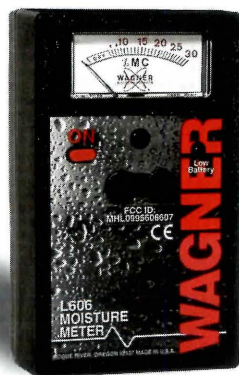


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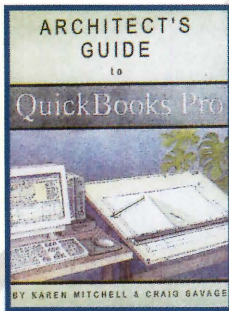
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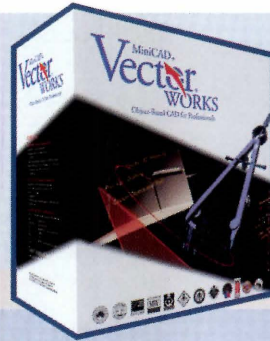
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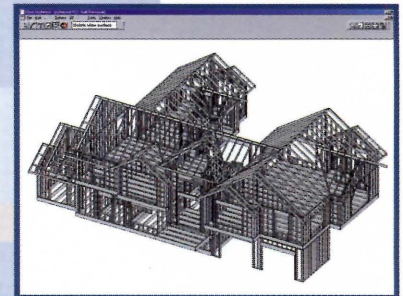


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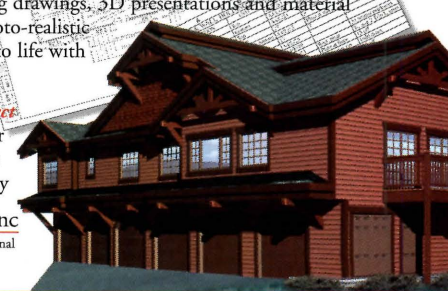
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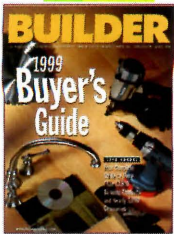
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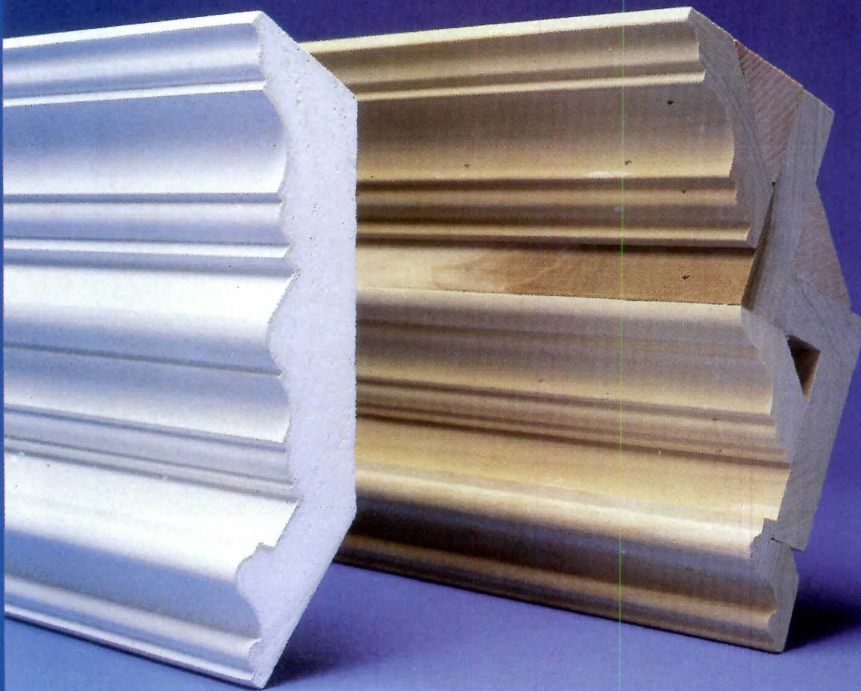
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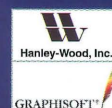
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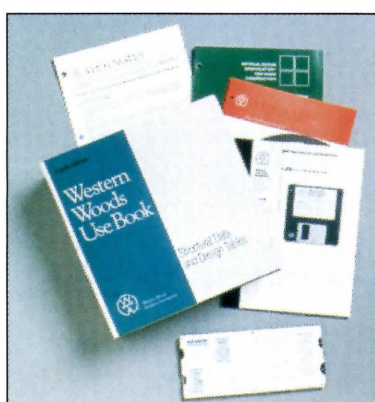


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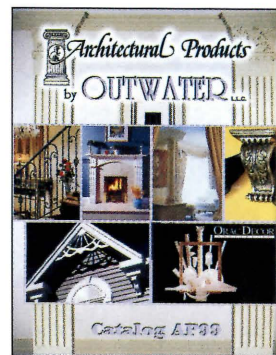
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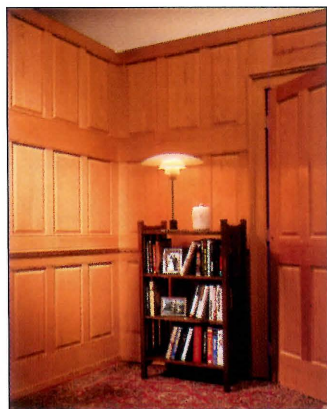
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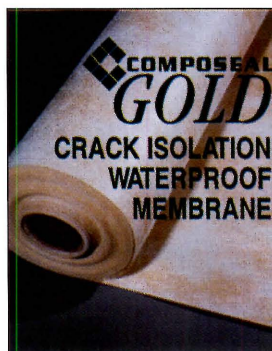
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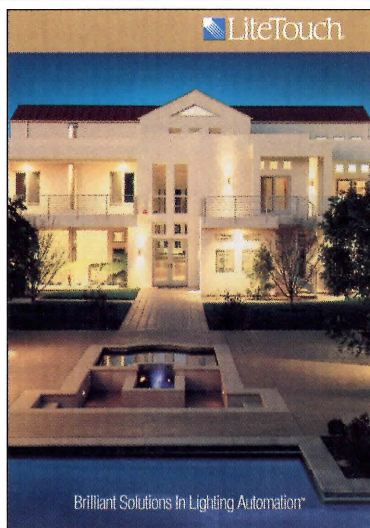
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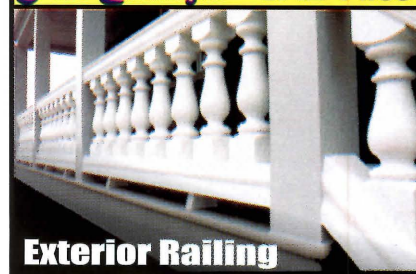


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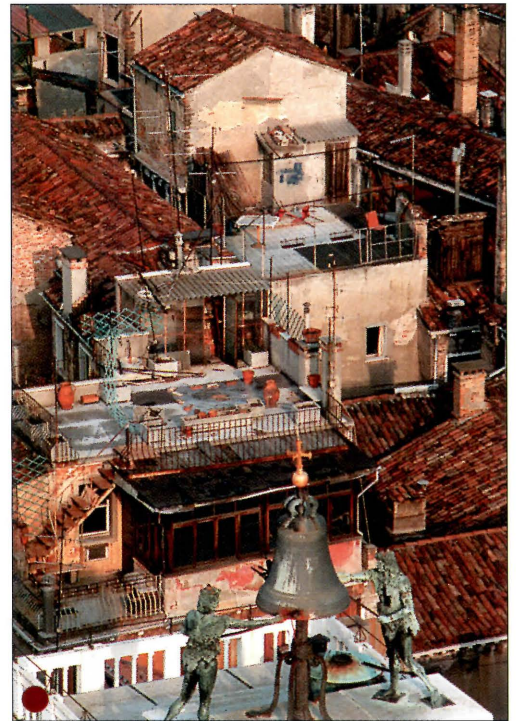
# special places world tour

michael pyatok trains his camera on the chaotic charms of communities abroad.

more and more frequently, restrictive design regulations and zoning requirements dominate American communities. I sometimes wonder if these limitations are stealing from us the rich cultural expression and exciting combinations of land uses and appearances that other countries take for granted.

In various places I've visited on vacation, I've noticed a charm most American towns and cities lack. The photographs here depict four such spots. **ra**

*Michael Pyatok, FAIA, is principal of Pyatok Associates, in Oakland, Calif., a firm that specializes in affordable housing.*



**Bangkok, Thailand:** Laundries as backyard, home-based family businesses face a side canal used for transportation downtown.

**A town in Andalusia, southern Spain:** Despite the high level of homogeneity spawned by a limited variety of materials and construction methods, this town exudes a sense of serendipity.

**Hong Kong:** A wall of high-rise pop-out porches extends these tiny flats into the outdoors, providing them with another "room."

**Venice, Italy:** Rooftops become another seemingly unregulated realm of habitation, away from the noise and heat of the streets below.

Photos: Michael Pyatok